SCREEM

#24

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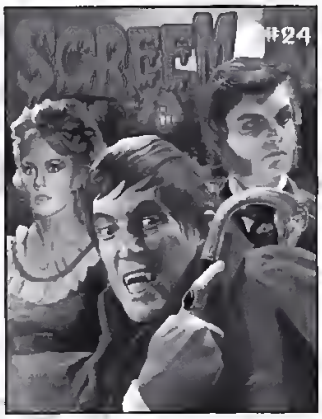

DIAMOND LIMITED COVER

Artwork by Mark Maddox

Both the newsstand cover and limited edition cover of *Screem* #24 can be purchased online at www.screemag.com

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If you are an artist or writer who'd like to contribute to future issues of *Screem*, drop us a line at *Screem Magazine*, 41 Mayer St., Wilkes Barre, PA 18702, or send an e-mail to SCREEMAG@AOL.COM.

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It's been over forty years since *Dark Shadows* officially signed off the air on the ABC-TV network in 1971. Yet the afternoon soap opera continues to have dedicated fans to this day. When MPI Home Video announced that they were going to issue a complete *Dark Shadows* box set (131 discs, $699.00 retail), the 2500 limited and numbered sets sold out as a pre-order! Dedication indeed . . .

R.J. Jamison (author of *Grayson Hell: A Hard Act to Follow* and co-author of *Barnabas and Company*) took on the assignment of writing the new-meets-old *Dark Shadows* piece for *Screem* #24. We think even the most seasoned *DS* fan will learn a thing or three from R.J.'s insightful work.

It will be interesting to see how *Dark Shadows* fans react to Tim Burton's big screen incarnation of the series. As we go to press, the film is wrapping up, so the jury is out for now. From what I've seen viewing several theatrical trailers, *Dark Shadows* looks to have a comedic element to it, which may not sit well for those who have taken the program seriously for almost half a decade. Personally, I'm looking forward to watching what Mr. Burton unleashes. Stay tuned!

Along with R.J., we welcome several new writers to our fold. David Krzisnik (who already has something wonderful in store for *Screem* #25) makes his debut reminiscing about the films of Ray Milland ("Mr. Versatile," page 45). David also is featured in our DVD review section. Welcome aboard, Mr. K! Our new U.K. import, Adrian Smith, speaks with Francoise Pascal. His interview with the actress is intriguing and insightful. Adrian also tackles a few DVDs as well. We hope to have him back in future issues of *Screem*. James Gormley went above and beyond the demands of ye olde editor when he spoke with Jon Spaihts, the co-screenwriter of Ridley Scott's *Prometheus*, which debuts in theaters in the U.S. on June 8th. Jimmy G's article was as close to deadline time as our printer could provide, and he did a fantastic job considering that the clock was working against him. Expect to see James back with us again. Greg Prato is a seasoned writer whose work has appeared in *Rolling Stone*. He is the author of former KISS member Eric Carr's biography, as well as *MTV Ruled the World*. His article on *The Story of Rock 'N' Roll Comics* appears in this issue. Many thanks, Greg!

I've known Ted Bohus a loooong time, he has contributed many behind the scenes favors for *Screem* throughout the years. When *The Deadly Spawn* received a Blu-ray release, I got on the horn and asked him if he'd like to wax poetic about his first film. Being the reliable trooper that he is, Ted knocked out a wonderful article, which informs readers on everything they could possibly want to know about Ted's cult classic flick. As always Theo, much appreciated!

And speaking of contributors, in the headline banner for *The Deadly Spawn*, you'll see original artwork by Allen Koszowski (aka Allen K). Allen's art has been seen on covers of genre magazines for over thirty years. (*Screem* #4's *Beast of Blood* cover was Allen's creation.) I'm excited that "K" is back . . . it's a been a long time!

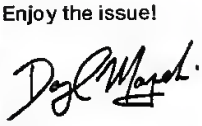
Greg Goodsell, Shane Dallmann and Michael Thomason are the *Screem* boomerangs. Whatever assignments I throw at them, they quickly whip back at me. These writers laugh in the face of deadlines, and always bring their 'A' game. I can't imagine an issue without them! I can easily say the same for Aaron Graham, Bryan L. Yeatter, David Wilt, and Brian Albright. Their film knowledge is an asset to this magazine, and I am grateful for all their hard work.

Tom Weaver is, well, Tom Weaver. One of the most respected writers in the industry, Tom always has ideas for *Screem* whenever I contact him (which is often!). His interview with *Black Zoo* star Jeanne Cooper is must-read material. Stephen Thrower (*Nightmare USA: The Untold Story of the Exploitation Independents*) debuts his article on Andy Milligan's *Nightbirds* here. Stephen is also credited in the liner notes for the film's Blu-ray. We hope Stephen graces us with his writing again. Johnny Legend appeared on the back cover of *Screem* #2. Mr. Legend has written for us as early as issue #3, and as recently as #15.

J.L. talks all things Doodles Weaver on page 9.

Congratulations are in order for our cover artist, Mark Maddox, who once again knocks it out of the park with two covers for our *Dark Shadows* edition. He is this year's Rondo Award winner for best artist, an honor he so rightfully deserves! And, finally . . . as always, Karen . . . if not for you . . . what would I do???

Enjoy the issue!



Editor

Thanke go out to: Ron Ademe, Kevin Clement, Diebolik DVD, Mike & Lise at Something Weird Video, Mike Reso, Paige Davis, Synapse Films, Clint Weller, Jeff Murphy, Rob Hauschild, Beer Manor Media, Paul's Hobby Zone, Chris Rowe, MPI/Dark Sky, Bruce Tinkel, Merk Hutzky, Steve Puchelski, Ken Kleh, Ed Peters, Kevin Pagen, Bloodgore Video, Mike Lafranier, Dawn Cresser, Mike Pierce, Roxtar Designs, , Shade Rupe, Juan Ortiz, Vin Davis, Allegra Haddigen, Jim Pierson,, Carol Cundiff, Rodrigo Brandao, Matt Barry, Reid Rossman,, Matt Kiernan, Greg Newman, Mike Yurcho, and anyone else who helped make *Screem* #24 possible....whew!

DARK SHADOWS RESURRECTED

Tim Burton discusses how to translate *Dark Shadows'* strange vibe for the 21st century

By R.J. Jamison

Dark Shadows—is it a title that is vaguely familiar? Perhaps you watched it with your mother, sister, aunt, or a group of friends who ran home after school everyday in order to not miss it? Did it disrupt your schoolwork and set the path for poor scholarship but a wondrous imagination? If you said yes to any of the above, you share something with film director Tim Burton and actors Johnny Depp and Michelle Pfeiffer.

May 2012 will see the third (or fourth depending upon how you count it) attempted relaunch of a television show that just will not die, an iconic bit of TV that crept into America's consciousness in 1967 (around the same time as the other TV franchise that has had multiple lives, *Star Trek*). Johnny Depp, who watched the serial with his sister during its original run, has been interested in the project for years. Director Burton ran home to catch the show and in an interview with *Screem*, today recognizes the show may be responsible for his "poor grades." Pfeiffer said in a recent interview that during a car ride with her husband, TV writer/producer David Kelly, she suggested that *Dark Shadows* should be revisited. Weeks later, she heard a remake was afoot and quickly put her name in the hat for a role.

Why would Depp and Burton want to remake this show? Johnny told *MTV News*, "Over the years, these sort of vampire movies have come out, vampire TV shows and no one looks like a vampire, what happened? . . . It was an opportunity, really an opportunity to sort of go into what really doesn't exist so much anymore [onscreen] . . . classic monster makeup and a classic monster character . . . that was really the inspiration Tim and I talked about." Burton and Depp share a childhood love for one of the oddest shows ever to air on television, with its story lines which harken back to themes both artists have been exploring since their first outing together in *Edward Scissorhands* in 1990—that of an otherworldly creature existing amongst contemporary American society, longing for that which he does not have.

Johnny Depp as Barnabas Collins.

Dark Shadows was a daily soap opera about the adventures of a post-Revolutionary War vampire from Collinsport, Maine. The premise doesn't seem so odd today given where soaps' plot lines often range, but 45 years ago when people spent their time watching programs as unvaried as *Green Acres*, *Gomer Pyle*, *The Lawrence Welk* or *Dean Martin Shows*, a daytime serial which featured ghosts, vampires, werewolves, I-Ching time traveling, and sorcery was quite the game changer for teenagers of both sexes, for *Dark Shadows* was that rare show that had female and male devotees. And for the many fans that still celebrate the show today, the longing for their Age of Aquarius vampire, one Barnabas Collins, still resonates. Barnabas, unlike all previous vampires, was not happy with his particular situation; he hated being a "loathsome creature." Barnabas evolved from a lethal monster to a sentry charged with protecting the Collins family in various centuries, while trying to deal with the predicament of lusting for blood. And of course, Barnabas longed for love and understanding. He very particularly wanted one specific love, his fiancée from 1795, a French girl from Martinique named Josette. But Barnabas in his randy youth bedded his fiancée's maid, the beautiful Angelique, who did not take kindly to being tossed aside. The maid turned out to be the worst possible scorned woman, an obsessive, vindictive witch. In repayment for his callousness, Angelique made Barnabas a vampire and thus the afternoon serial of all serials was off and running after a stodgy, sputtering start in 1966.

As documented in the book *Barnabas and Company, 2nd edition* (Hamrick & Jamison), *Dark Shadows* was originally conceived in 1966 as an updated Jane Eyre-type story with an orphan ingénue arriving by train to the isolated hamlet of Collinsport, Maine (a train hadn't even stopped there in five years before Victoria Winters stepped off). The story originated from a dream by TV sports producer Dan Curtis, who figured there might be more money in producing soap operas than sports. He developed the new show with the disgraced Hollywood actress Joan Bennett leading a cast of veteran New York stage actors. A few years earlier, Bennett's philandering husband, producer Walter Wanger (*Cleopatra, Scarlet Street, The Bitter Tea of General Yen*), came upon her and her agent (and lover) in a parking lot. Bullets were discharged from a revolver, one ending up in the agent's groin. It was deemed a horrible accident. But in the wake of this scandal, Bennett, who had recently co-starred with Spencer Tracy and Elizabeth Taylor in *Father of the Bride* and *Father's Little Dividend,* could not get a job in film. She took work in television and on national theatrical tours in productions such as *Barefoot in the Park*. When an agent suggested a new daytime soap offering three guaranteed shows a week at $333 per show, the money and steady work were hard to refuse. Joan graced the very first episode of *Shadows* in an impossibly elegant long black dress with ropes of pearls, and appeared in the 1,245th (and final) episode costumed in a corseted mid-19th century dress. The show debuted with a nationally known, classy leading lady and a unique atmosphere derived from the haunting theme music and location shots from Newport, Rhode Island.

Dark Shadows in its first year followed ingénue Victoria Winters (portrayed by New York socialite and future mistress of Claus von Bülow, Alexandra Moltke-Isles) as she tried to illuminate the mystery of her past (Victoria had been born in Maine to unknown parents and raised in an orphanage). Along the way, she dealt with a wealthy family in decline, a troubled adolescent, and various local men eyeing her loveliness. But this format was too similar to other daytime fare and the ratings barely registered above a comatose pulse. With the show in jeopardy of cancellation, the producer, being a mischievous fellow, decided to toss in a ghost one day. It proved to be a popular move. He then introduced a woman born of fire who planned a rebirthing suicide for herself and young son; she was the Phoenix.

The original Barnabas Collins, portrayed by Jonathan Frid.

That move pumped up the ratings noticeably so the producer told his team to throw in the kitchen sink. Shortly after the blazing death of the Phoenix, a visiting bum named Willie tried to steal some jewels from the Collins family crypt. Upon opening a nearly 200-year-old casket, Willie was greeted by the lace-draped hand of an undead relative. Barnabas Collins arrived in the 20th Century on April 18, 1967 with a fictitious tale of emanating from England, the last descendant of the "original" Barnabas Collins. Since he brought romantic stories of the family's fabled past, his presence was bought hook, line, and sinker. But Barnabas' unease with the 20th century was evident in many ways, particularly in interactions with the "modern" woman.

Embodied by Canadian actor Jonathan Frid, Barnabas was cautious, morose, and more mysterious than malevolent. Many said Frid's uniquely hesitant portrayal, which struck the shows viewers so deeply, was based on his own discomfort before the camera and trouble remembering his lines. A British-trained Shakespearean stage actor, he took the short-term role to enhance his savings before relocating to California, where he planned to teach and direct. Tim Burton told *Screem* that Frid was "earnest, everybody was very serious, and that's the thing I most remember about it, the kind of over-earnestness which gave it its strange tone."

Barnabas disappeared every day for unexplained business meetings, only showing up for after-dinner cocktails with his "family." Soon several "easy" gals who worked the docks began falling ill and eventually one wisecracking waitress disappeared completely. No one tied the odd incidents to the well-mannered Englishman who waxed nostalgically about Collinwood's great past, which he had *read* about in the journals of the *"original"* Barnabas Collins.

The missing waitress, Maggie Evans, was trapped in Barnabas' basement, where he with obsessive intensity tried to convince the girl she was the embodiment of his lost love, Josette Du Prés. Eventually Maggie escaped and was hidden in a nearby mental sanitarium. There the lead doctor, a female who spent most of her time dangling a psychedelic amulet in hypnotism sessions, theorized something horrifyingly unique about Maggie's case. She then set out to prove it. Within a few weeks, Barnabas and Dr. Julia Hoffman were wary allies, she trying to cure his vampirism and he longing to be with a different longhaired local girl, having moved his obsession to the next Josette-in-waiting, Victoria Winters. It didn't take long for Dr. Julia to begin looking at him longingly and accepting his bad mental (and physical) treatment as a sign of his tortured regrettable state. A lovelorn buddy story infiltrated the soap.

Both Barnabas and Dr. Hoffman were originally conceived to last only thirteen weeks, with violent deaths ending their sojourn at Collinwood, but their huge popularity kept the actors off the unemployment line. The vampire story line saved the show, teens began flocking to the studio, fan mail poured in, and *Dark Shadows* was launched into the stratosphere of popularity with nearly 18 million weekly viewers at its peak.

Late in 1967, tensions ran too high between the Vampire and his doctor and the writers needed a way out (especially since the two characters were to stay on the show). Therefore, for cost-saving reasons, it was decided to use the entire cast (á la repertory theater style) in a flashback story to 1795/96 wherein Barnabas' tragic conversion into a vampire was told and the iconic witch Angelique was introduced.

This became another unique and well received trait, plot shifts between centuries—fans loved watching their favorite actors trying on new skin, clothes and different personalities, often quite opposite of their contemporary time characters. The show would navigate countless rapid-fire plot lines, traversing the 18th and 19th centuries, a two-week sojourn in the future—1995—and months in "parallel" time frames, 1970 and 1840. *DS'* top rated story line would take place in 1897, featuring a new leading man, the werewolf-turned-Dorian Gray ageless figure, Quentin Collins, played by David Selby (*Falcon Crest, Tell Me You Love Me, The Social Network*). Quentin would be in all future story lines with Barnabas and Dr. Hoffman, attempting in some fashion to save the Collins family from their irreducible fate.

Unlike other soaps, *Dark Shadows* never dwelt too long on one romance, story, or dilemma. Producer Curtis didn't have the patience for it, and oversaw significant story lines being wrapped up in one episode and new ones rolled out before the closing music rolled. No postmortem was given, robbing the fans of a chance to digest before moving on or, in the age before VCRs and DVRs, a chance to catch up. This would prove the shows undoing as well as its lure.

The charm of *Dark Shadows* was not only its distinctive setting in different centuries with characters manifesting all manner of supernatural dilemmas (in addition to the standard ghoulies were the Old Earth Leviathans, a modern Jekyll/Hyde, and women stepping in and out of portraits), but the budget and technology of the late '60s necessitated a "live" presentation. While the shows were taped, retakes were not a luxury afforded the actors, so retakes were only given for special effects gone wrong. Therefore, the many bloopers—flies on actors' faces, nose-picking vampires, muffled lines, tech crew members walking across the set, and obvious teleprompter reading—were aired and today played for mirth (the *DS Bloopers* DVD is a steady seller).

Frid checks his bite.

Grayson Hall and Jonathan Frid.

The two faces of Quentin Collins: David Selby looks a bit scarred. Alex Stevens in full howling mode.

At the White House, Jonathan Frid and Tricia Nixon greet children for the UNICEF Halloween Party in 1969.

David Selby, who embodied the savoir faire of the ageless playboy-werewolf Quentin Collins, recalled for *Screem* how the show uniquely fit the times. "Some viewed it and were frightened. It had cross appeal, it was not just boys but girls—and adults. Some viewed it as camp but it was able to create its own world."

Between 1967-1970 Barnabas was everywhere; the show rode a merchandising bonanza with games, cards, watches, soundtrack albums, and all manner of fan-focused trinkets. And Frid, as well as the other actors, made countless personal appearances at shopping malls and car shows, and on *The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson, The Mike Douglas Show*, and a Halloween Party appearance at the White House.

In another trailblazing move for the daytime serial, while daily traversing multiple complex, supernatural-laden plot lines, the acting troupe and technical staff began production on a feature film adaptation during the summer of 1970. *House of Dark Shadows* was released on the big screen in October that same year. The successful film mirrored producer Dan Curtis' original story line, with Barnabas being a more craven, violent creature who destroys nearly his entire family by the last frame of the film. It shocked a lot of parents who started peeking over their children's shoulders and turning off the TV set. This coincided with the now breakneck storytelling style, which left even the most sincere fans confused. Tim Burton says this is when he started doing his homework rather than trying to track the various confusing story lines. Even onetime leading lady, Alexandra Moltke (who left the series in late 1968) said she couldn't make sense of the show's plot.

The show's ratings began to decline and while longtime fans argue the ratings began going up again in the end of 1970, cast and crew were exhausted and ready to move on. Jonathan Frid was worried about his post-*DS* career and being typecast as a vampire. After five years of long days and a roller coaster of public acclaim, the last episode was filmed on March 24 and aired April 2, 1971. A second feature film, *Night of Dark Shadows*, immediately went into production and was released four months later to moderate success.

Even without the daily show, the merchandising juggernaut continued with paperback novels and comics and the shows stars topping "Favorite Daytime Actor and Actress" lists for a few more years. A decade later, the cult status of the show was sealed with the initiation of annual *Dark Shadows* Festivals in the Los Angeles and New York areas with appearances by most of the surviving cast. Then, the show was put into syndication, playing on local channels (including PBS stations) and eventually enjoyed a ten-year run on the Sci-Fi Channel (now *Syfy*).

Baby boomer TV executives and series creator Dan Curtis relaunched the series on NBC nighttime in 1991, starring British actor Ben Cross (*Chariots of Fire, Star Trek*, 2009), Jean Simmons (*Spartacus, The Thorn Birds*), Joanna Going, and Joseph Gordon-Levitt making one of his earliest major appearances as the young troubled tyke, David Collins. (It is said that *DS* head writer Sam Hall recommended Johnny Depp at this time for the role of Barnabas.) The show recrafted the Barnabas origin story with superior quality sets, costumes, and locations. But the unique vibe of the '60s show was missing and coverage of the First Gulf War often pre-empted the show. NBC did not renew it for a second season.

Loyal fans continued to envision a revival after seeing *Star Trek* take off with a "new generation." But Curtis was wedded to the show as he first dreamt it, not taking to second generation themes. He considered e musical for a short time when *Jekyll and Hyde* proved successful in the late 1990s on Broadway. But when Tony Award-winning composer Rupert Holmes—famous for "Escape (The Piña Colada Song)"—dropped out, the idea died. In 2004, Curtis authorized a new *DS* pilot for the WB network. He ceded some control to director P.J. Hogan (*Muriel's Wedding, My Best Friend's Wedding*) but the general story line followed the same lines—Victoria Winters for the third time arrived in a dark, foggy coastal town. The pilot was shot but the WB passed.

Dan Curtis died in 2006 and word soon spread that Johnny Depp wanted the rights. Fans were excited—Depp es Barnabas, ideal! And then 2007 passed, 2008, and 2009, with no word on a script or production. Fans bemoaned, would it ever happen? And in 2010 it was announced, production dates in England and Tim Burton on board as director. Speculation began, who'd play which roles? Angelique, the unearthly, beautiful witch who curses Barnabas to the life of a vampire, the pivotal role of Dr. Julia Hoffman uniquely created by Oscar nominee Grayson Hall, or Naomi Collins and Elizabeth Collins Stoddard the mysterious matriarchs created by Joan Bennett? Maggie, David, Willie, Carolyn, and Roger—who would step into their shoes? Would the film include the very popular werewolf/ladies' man Quentin?

The cast filled out with Michelle Pfeiffer as the always elegant Elizabeth Collins Stoddard, Oscar nominees Helena Bonham Carter as Dr. Julia Hoffman (in a wig and head tilt harkening back to Hall's portrayal) and Jackie Earle Haley as Willie—Barnabas' aide-de-camp—and former Bond girl Eva Green (in a blonde wig) as the vindictive witch done wrong, Angelique Bouchard. Members of the original series cast including 87-year-old Jonathan Frid, Lara Parker, David Selby, and Kathryn Leigh Scott will appear in cameos, thereby "blessing" the production.

Selby said he assumed Burton and Depp "wanted to pay homage—to have some of the people associated with the original series. I think it was terrific that they wanted to do that. We had suggested years ago that Johnny Depp and Tim Burton would be a great combo to tackle *DS*, and lo and behold, it came to be—I think that it's wonderful that Johnny and Tim Burton would want to remember the show. Whatever take they put on it, I feel that it is going to be terrific. Anyone who has looked at their past work knows that the show is in good hands." Selby added that the original series actors had no dialog and their appearances will be along the lines of *Where's Waldo?* Photos suggest they will be in a party scene wearing groovy 1970s threads.

Johnny Depp as Barnabas Collins and Eva Green as Angelique Bouchard in Warner Bros. Pictures' and Village Roadshow Pictures' *Dark Shadows*, a Warner Bros. Pictures release. Photo by Peter Mountain.

In discussing how he was tackling *Shadows* unique "strange vibe," Tim Burton told *Screem*, "It's a tricky thing because it's a tone which is hard to put into words. What I recall is that it was very serious and that gave it its weird vibe, you know it wasn't being played for laughs." Providing direction to the 2012 cast was not easily done, since Burton feels the tone defies words. How did he help the cast understand this show's unique appeal? Burton explained, "People like Michelle were every morning watching episodes of the original *DS*, so she kind of got into it that way. A lot of the cast had never seen it and were shocked when they did see it—'wow, that's not very good.' But that's part of what we loved about it. I think that the challenge was to find that undefinable tone." David Selby, after his few days of filming in England, confirmed that the "unique vibe" was evident on the set.

Some early press notices about the new film indicate it is a "Gothic comedy." Burton says that's not his intent, but snippets of information certainly do seem to suggest that some levity will be experienced with an 18th century gentleman awakening into an era of female liberation and technology. Barnabas may wax poetic in 1972 (the year the film is largely set), which may come across as comical but Depp, here in a nod to the original Barnabas, is being sincere. Depp said in 2010, "For me, even the conversations I've had with Tim, what Jonathan Frid did with that character and that classic look he created, I find it very difficult to stray very far from that . . . with maybe just a couple of different touches here and there . . . But Jonathan Frid's Barnabas was so special."

Director Burton sees *DS* as the story of a "hermetically sealed" family, where the supernatural will be placed in reality. Interestingly, Frid in an interview from the mid-1980s noted that his portrayal centered on a man trying to not embarrass his very upper crust family and aiming toward living an existence of honor rather than horror.

As *Dark Shadows* sails back into the movie theaters, longtime fans hope the 21st century will welcome and embrace its unique nature while attracting a whole new legion of fans to the fold. Will new fans visit the old show (the complete series is now available on a DVD box set from MPI Home Video) and embrace its oddball sense and passion? And perhaps note a few familiar faces—Kate Jackson in her first professional role as a ghost/governess or Harvey Keitel with a belly to the bar at the Blue Whale. There has been a recent run of popular franchise reboots, namely *Star Trek* and *Battlestar Galatica* but more than a few fell apart, i.e., *Charlie's Angels*, *V*, and *Bewitched*. Selby recalled in his book *My Shadowed Past* that *Dark Shadows* fit into an era when children were seeking an escape from the stresses their parents faced—political turmoil, Vietnam, college campus protests and changing roles for women. But now, in an era with vampires and werewolves everywhere you look, will *DS* resonate with a culture that now, perhaps, too often focuses on escapist entertainment? Longtime fans have a wait and see attitude given that the new production is in the hands of two admired artists and avowed fans of the original series.

Left to right: David Selby, Lara Parker, Johnny Depp, Jonathan Frid, director Tim Burton, and Kathryn Leigh Scott on the set of Warner Bros. Pictures' and Village Roadshow Pictures' *Dark Shadows*. Photo by Leah Gallo.

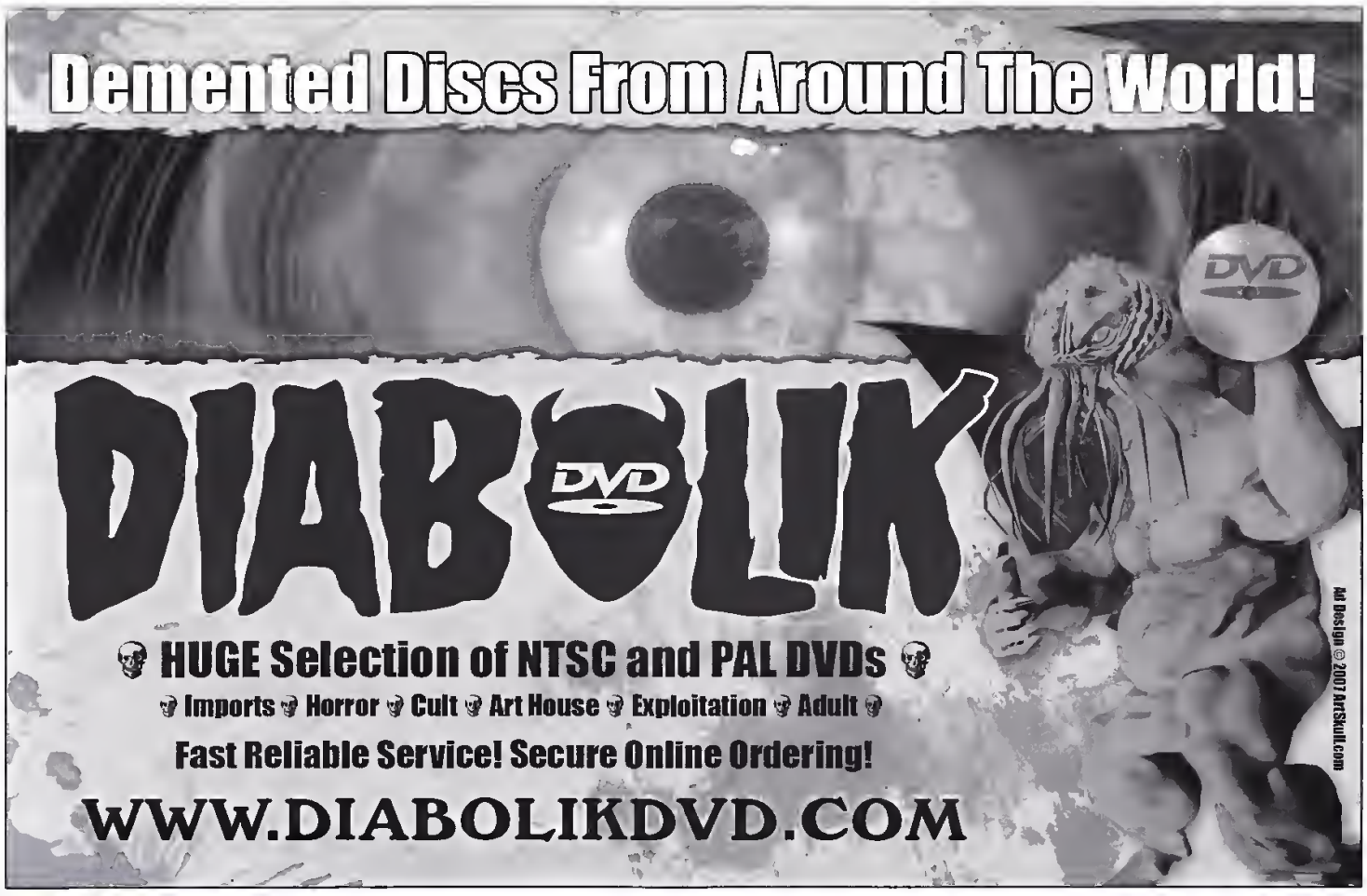
From 1966-1971, Collinsport, Maine, was a spot people wanted to visit everyday, but will today's youth feel the same, and how will their parents who likely remember this kooky outpost of television history feel? Will it be comfortingly familiar and fun or awkwardly sentimental?

R.J. Jamison is the co-author, with the late Craig Hamrick, of* Barnabas and Company, 2nd edition, *and is the biographer of the Oscar-nominated,* Dark Shadows *leading lady—*Grayson Hall: A Hard Act to Follow. *Both are available from Amazon.com. See www.barnabasandcompany.com and www.graysonhall.net.

For information on* Dark Shadows *Festivals, visit www.darkshadowsfestival.com. The Festival will host a summer event in Tarrytown, NY, in July.

Editor's note*: Screem *would like to thank Jim Pierson and Allegra Haddigan for their help in making this article possible.

Dark Shadows *opens in theaters on May 11th, 2012.*



HOW I SPAWNED A MONSTER

Article by Ted A. Bohus

The Deadly Spawn was a very special film for me. It was the first film produced by my own production company, Filmline Communications. But let's go back to the beginning, circa 1979. Things were not working out with my partner Don Dohler and the weekly trip to Baltimore was killing me. I was employed by New Jersey Bell Telephone (now Verizon), and every Friday I'd pack the car, drive to New Brunswick, pick up John Dods (special effects), and head out to Maryland.

We'd shoot the film, then late Sunday night I'd drive back, get home at 3 or 4 in the morning, and have to be ready for work by 7 a.m. This went on for months. Then, a problem with financing arose and the project was put on hold. (It wasn't until years later that Don was able to complete the film, *Nightbeast*.)

So, a year later I called John Dods and said, "Hey, why don't we make *a* monster movie right here in Jersey?" He thought it was a good idea and offered his services as special effects supervisor. I got an idea for a story after reading, in *National Geographic* magazine, about scientists finding prehistoric seedpods encased in Arctic ice. They thawed the ice and these seeds were still alive, or something crazy like that.

I figured, let's put a seed-like, dormant creature inside a meteor and have it crash on earth, unleashing *a* horde of mutant horrors to terrorize the neighborhood. Good idea! It was only later that I realized it was *The Blob!* I came up with a title I thought sounded cool at the time, *The Deadly Spawn*.

At first, I wanted to produce, write, and direct the film, but as the reality of the job sank in, I realized I couldn't do everything, especially with a full-time job. John said he had a friend, Doug McKeown, who worked in a theater group and had experience directing actors and writing. Fine. We got together, had a great meeting, and Doug said he would take the story, come up with the screenplay, and direct. We'd all work together like one big happy family.

While working with Doug on screenplay ideas, I was trying to come up with an interesting creature design to give to John. I finally came up with something I thought was different. It was basically *a* man in a suit, but with two additional heads that were operated from behind like hand puppets. Besides the arms, which ended in huge claws similar to the mutant in *This Island Earth*, tentacles would also be operated from behind.

I thought this was a very unusual and innovative monster. When I showed the designs to John, the first thing he said was, "Oh no, not another man in *a* rubber suit monster!" He thought it would be better to just have this snake-like mass under the toothy heads. I said, "Fine, as long as it stays with the basic design of three heads with plenty of teeth, pincer arms coming from behind, and tentacles." After going back and forth with it for a few days, John came up with a drawing that we both liked. It had a globular body, one main head, filled with razor sharp teeth, flanked by two smaller heads. Two tentacle-like, clawed arms spouted out from either side. John also designed the creatures in various stages of development, from small tadpole versions to the full seven-foot Mother Spawn.

Everything was going along fine. Doug was writing, John was making monsters, now I had to come up with money, locations, actors, equipment, money, film, and money. I figured I'd start with . . . money!

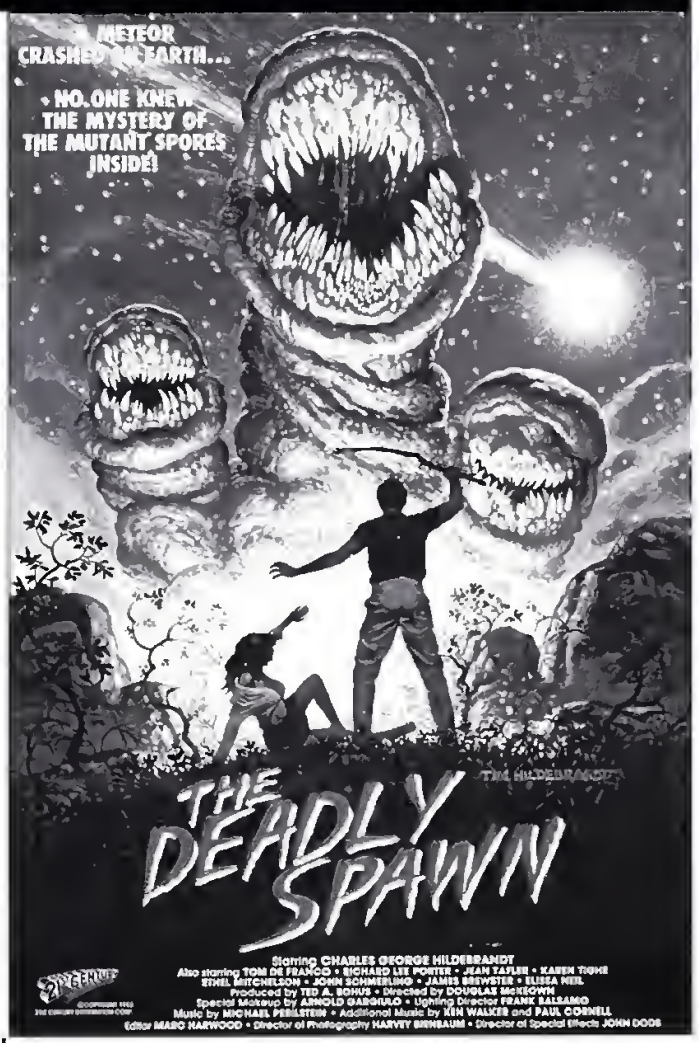
How do you get funding for an independent feature film? The independent backer. If you hobnob with enough people, you will probably, eventually, find someone willing to talk to you about investing in film production. You explain to them that *a* lot of small films went on to make millions of dollars. *Halloween, The Evil Dead, A Nightmare on Elm Street, Night of the Living Dead, The Blair Witch Project*, etc., etc. Of course you don't tell them that it is usually the distributor that makes those millions.

This is what happened with *The Deadly Spawn*. A friend of mine introduced me to his brother Ron Giannotto. Ron is a collector and film enthusiast. At the time he was in medical school. He and a student friend put up the first monies for *The Deadly Spawn*. We were now a legitimate film production company.

Continuing my streak of good luck, I asked my friend, fantasy artist Tim Hildebrandt, who painted the *Star Wars* poster, Tolkien Calendars, etc., if he would lend his name to the production. He immediately wanted to do anything he could to help. His first love was filmmaking—even over painting.

At this point, I was still amazed at how easy all this was. Everyone in the business I'd spoken to told me what I was trying to put together was impossible. Make *a* special effects laden film for under eighteen thousand dollars . . . impossible! Get equipment, locations, actors, editing, materials, and crew for nothing . . . impossible! Get the negative cut, pay the lab, do *a* final mix, keep all these people together for over a year . . . impossible! If this was all so impossible, then why were we going to start shooting next week?

Then, of course, I began to learn why it was impossible. I cursed myself for ever thinking things were too easy. Less than *a* week before shooting, the guy with the equipment called and said he got offered a paying job out of state and was going to take it. "What?!" I yelled, "We start shooting in four days!" "Sorry." CLICK. I sat back in my chair totally devastated. How can this happen? How could I tell everyone after all their work?



I frantically called equipment rental companies. Not only was a camera, sound, and lighting package totally out of my budget range, they wanted a half-million dollar insurance policy and a ten thousand dollar check that they would hold until the equipment was returned in good condition.

That word, impossible, kept ringing in my head all night. The next morning everyone called to confirm our schedule for Saturday. While I was on the phone, a strange feeling came over me, a feeling that everything was going to be all right. Either that, or I'd gone completely mad. By midday I figured I better call John and give him the bad news first. Those smug bastards that told me I couldn't do it were right! As I reached for the phone, it rang. It was Harvey Birnbaum, the second guy who called with an equipment package. He dropped out early on, but was now available. I asked, almost too horrified to hear the answer, "How about this Saturday?". . . (Long pause) . . . "OK." We set up a meeting immediately. I hung up the phone and literally started dancing around the room. You bastards haven't beaten me yet!!

The day before shooting I asked my friend at a distribution company if he had any old contracts for crew or actors. He gave me a few, but for the most part I had to make up a legal sounding document. When I called a lawyer and found out how much he wanted to make up these contracts, I asked him if he wanted to invest! The contracts were kept simple. The investors got their entire investment paid back in full out of first monies in. Then the deferments were paid, and finally the percentages.

Contracts were made up, actors rehearsed, equipment was made ready. I kept checking everything over and over. After that last humbling experience, I would never think anything was too easy *again*. The day finally came. I could hardly sleep that night, thinking something might happen to one of the actors, or the equipment truck coming all the way from Long Island might be late or get in *an* accident, or was I forgetting something? I finally drifted off to sleep . . .

Day one. Made all the last minute calls, and got ready to go. The Hildebrandts' house was in Bernardsville, New Jersey, about an hour away. A few of the crew met at my house, so we had this little caravan. We got there and started setting up. The equipment van arrived and was unpacked. The actors all got there and started rehearsing. So far so good.

Where was Frank Balsamo, our lighting director, with the film stock? Finally, he pulled up and I ran over, "Frank, get the film to Harvey right away." "What?!" he continued, "I thought you said you were bringing the film." "No . . . look, it doesn't matter, please go back and get the film." Oh well, a two-hour delay. Now, where's the monster? I called the studio in New Brunswick, hoping no one would answer the phone. Of course, they did. It seemed that when they were building the big Mother Spawn, no one actually thought about bringing it out of the basement workshop. It was too wide for any doorway. They finally had to cut one of the heads off and reattach it later. What a great stert. Little did I know this was just a little precursor of things to come.

As the weeks went by, we started to get some good footage in the can. The occasional calamity, of course, would always rear its ugly head. One of the biggest nightmares was the creature's drool. Don't forget, this is 1981, and we all just started in the business and weren't familiar with the tricks of the trade. The substance we thought most resembled the consistency of monster drool was rubber cement! One day, I was complaining to another effects artist about the mess, when he said, "Rubber cement?! Are you crazy? Just mix baking soda, water, and add a little starch to it. It cleans up in a second." He was right.

Every weekend we'd get more done. Every day was a learning experience. A guy from Philadelphia, Mike Perilstein, called and said he'd like to work on the music score. By the time the film was finished, three people contributed to the music—Ken Walker, Mike Perilstein and Paul Cornell. Paul did most of the sound effects along with John Dods.

I was introduced to Marc Harwood who had made a few short films. He was interested in editing *Spawn*. He seemed like he knew what he was doing, and besides, he had his own equipment. He was in! (I still work with Marc to this day, and he created visual effects for my film, *Hell On Earth*.)

Then, one weekend a different problem arose that took me totally by surprise. Evidently, John wanted to direct some of the scenes dealing with special effects. Doug McKeown, the director, did not like this idea. I had to make a decision and stuck by my partner, John. The bottom line was that Doug left the production. How could a film turn two people against each other so that they cannot be in the same room together?

At a certain point, everybody wanted to put their two cents into the film. When you're not paying people, if you're not really careful, a film can turn into a free-for-all. I finally said, "Look, as the producer, I make all the decisions, if you don't like it, I'll get somebody else to do that job, you can walk!"

With all the crazy stuff happening, I wanted to try and get the film done faster. A guy I knew in New York also had his own equipment, but he wanted to get paid. I figured I would schedule a week straight to shoot. Gee, just like a regular movie! I asked everyone to take a week off work. I convinced the investors that putting in this little extra money and shooting seven days straight would save us months work. Aside from some of the film being out of focus, the plan worked.

The actors were a real pleasure to work with. That is until they were offered paying acting jobs. When Jean Tafler had to leave (she played the love interest who was to survive with her boyfriend), I had to figure a way to kill her off. Something not too bad . . . so, I had her head ripped off by the Mother Spawn and her headless, lifeless body thrown through a third-story window. Anybody else wanna leave early?!

When we did have a couple actors leave for awhile, we had to shut down. When one, Richard Lee Porter, returned, his hair was much shorter. It was all action at the end, so we just sprayed down his head with water. I figured people would think the sweating made his hair shrink up. I guess it worked. Nobody ever mentioned anything about his hair.

Tom DeFranco gave a noteworthy performance, and one day got so much into the role he actually smashed his head diving out a third-story window. That take was left in the film and to this day it's painful to watch.

Charles Hildebrandt did an outstanding job considering he never acted before. With all the laws about child actors (and I think we broke them all), it was handy having him live right there. Karen Tighe, the "cute blond," not only did a great job, but put on film what I consider to be one of the genre's great screams.

Ethel Michelson and John Schmerling as the Aunt and Uncle were fine, accomplished actors. Great work. The ladies' luncheon scene with Judith Mayes was hysterical. As they were chowing down on the remains of one of the baby spawns that got caught in the blender, her outlandish take after eating the goo was priceless.

One night, I was sitting on the Hildebrandt porch, looking kind of depressed. Tim came over and asked what was the matter. I had been thinking about the end of the film. I was not happy with the ending and wanted to change it. The trick ending I really wanted would be far too expensive, so I was trying to come up with something else. I said, "How about at the end, when all the creatures have been destroyed, the battered and bruised teenagers look up at the night sky and see hundreds of meteors coming down? Of course insinuating that there were creatures in all of them."

Tim looked at me. "What's the ending you really want?"

The *Spawn* crew: (top, left to right) Greg Ramoundas, Frank Balsamo, Jack Piccuro, Richard Valley, and T. Davis. (bottom, left to right) John Matthews, Kevin Shinnick, and John Payne.

"I want everyone to think it's all over, and don't forget, throughout the film we sort of indicate that these things just keep growing. We pan back away from the house and see the countryside and mountains. Slowly the ground begins to shake and then turns into a huge earthquake. All of a sudden, a half-mile-wide spawn head lifts out from under the mountain and bellows into the night." Tim just looked at me, thought for a minute, and said, "I can build that set for a few hundred dollars." Ya-hooooooo!

After Doug left, John shot some of the monster stuff over like he wanted. And to be fair, most of the footage was better.

Well, this was it! The film was in the can! It's still amazing to me that the Hildebrandts could have an entire film crew in their home almost every weekend for over a year. They were, indeed, very special people. (Tim passed away in 2006, rest in peace, my friend.)

Now for the fun part . . . postproduction. Because of our long production period, Marc, the editor, had plenty of time to edit as we went along. John, of course, wanted to edit the special effects sequences. We only locked horns a few times, mostly over the take length.

One day he called me and said the entire sequence where Jean Tafler gets her head bit off was unusable. I immediately went down there to check this out. He showed me the raw footage. Fine, it was just as I remembered. We only needed very quick shots and it finally worked out.

Now we had a cut film, with music and sound effects on the way, and it seemed like most of the problems were behind us. That's when we ran out of money. I figured I'd take the film around and maybe cut a deal before it was finished. I asked Tim if he could possibly do a *Deadly Spawn* painting. Having a Hildebrandt poster I felt would be a major selling tool.

I took the film around to four or five different distribution companies. They all said the same thing, "It looks great, bring it back when it's done." Doing a final mix and making a print was very expensive. Even with the investors putting up extra money, it still was not enough.

The last company I took the film to was mostly interested in foreign rights. I trekked into New York with my film cans under one arm and a sloppy dialog track for interlock under the other. I set up the projector in a small conference room, where Alexander Beck, (AB Enterprises), two of his employees, and I sat and watched the whole thing.

The entire time a friend's voice of advice echoed inside my head, "Don't show the film to anyone until it is completely finished." The film was over, they turned on the lights. Alex immediately took me into his office and offered to pay for the final mix and print if he could have foreign rights. I had a deal. *The Deadly Spawn* would get finished!

Well, here it was, the moment we'd all been waiting for. The world premiere of *The Deadly Spawn*. We would have it at my friend's nightclub, The Limelight, in Hackensack, New Jersey, on Saturday, November 27th, 1982 at 6:30 p.m. We had everybody there—family, friends, all the people I worked with at the phone company, cast, crew, strangers I'd pull in off the street. We put the 16mm projector on the bar and projected it onto a 15-foot screen. As the end credits came up, a roar of applause erupted. People were laughing, some crying. This made it all worthwhile.

Affer that party and now with a finished film, I was ready to hit the distnbution circuit again. I never had any illusions that this little film would do anything other than possibly get a limited video release. You can't begin to understand the sheer amazement I was going through when three of the five distributors that screened the film wanted to blow it up to 35mm and give it a theatrical release.

RKR, Troma, and 21st Century were all offering a bid for the film. The main two I concentrated on were Troma And 21st. Troma was small but they put a lot of aggressive publicity campaigns together, and seemed to really stand behind their films no matter how silly they were. But 21st Century, on the other hand, was a publicly held company. You know, stockholders and everything. At the time I thought this meant something.

Affer hearing all these offers, I got a really crazy idea. If these smaller companies all wanted the film, why not submit it to a major? What have I got to lose? Well, my only 16mm print for one thing. A few of the majors were willing to look at it, but I wouldn't risk sending the print to the West Coast. At that time, I couldn't afford to print another one. Then, the call came that I was waiting for.

Paramount Pictures still had its main offices in New York, and they agreed to screen the film and return it within a week. I had been told it was a rare occurrence when Paramount would even look at a 16mm print. I hand delivered the film cans and went home.

I only told a small group of people I submitted the film, I was so sure of being rejected. But still, I was scared to leave the house until I heard something. At the time I had no answering machine and certainly no secretary. A few days later the call came, you know the type, So and so is calling from Paramount Pictures, could you please hold? I was petnfied.

I don't remember whom I spoke to, but I was told the film passed the initial screening and was being sent to the "final board" for approval. "What does that mean?" I asked. "If the final board approves, then we are authorized to make you an offer for distribution." I asked how long this would take and was told I'd know within a week. I don't have to tell you what I did when I hung up the phone.

I called a few people and told them the news. The only reason we could figure out as to why Paramount would even consider a film like *The Deadly Spawn* is that maybe they thought low-budget films would become trendy or something. Who knows? Who cares! I was negotiating with Para-f#@*%!-mount!!

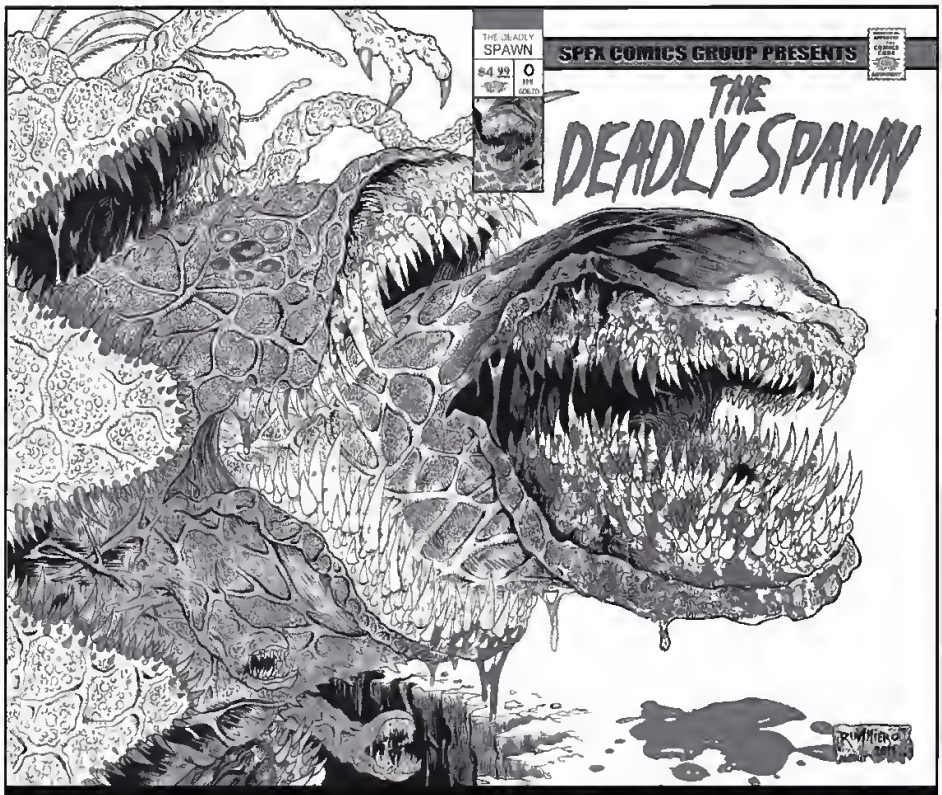
I wish this story had a happy ending. When this really nice guy, I wish I could remember his name, finally called, he sadly said, "I'm sorry Ted, the Executive Board just thought the film was a little rough for Paramount's standards. We were really pulling for it here in the office."

What a nice thing to say, but I still felt like shit. When you get caught up in this stuff, you begin to think it really has a chance of happening. Oh well, now that I fell off the Paramount mountain, it was back to the small-time.

By now 21st Century (Art Schweitzer, Tom Ward) had the best deal on the table. Troma really wanted the film but they didn't want to pay as much. When I was finally happy with a draft of the contract from 21st, Troma called and said they were still thinking about matching or bettering my deal. It was Tuesday and I told them I was going into New York to sign the contract with 21st on Thursday at 3 o'clock. If I didn't hear from them before that, it was gone. Wednesday came and went, no call. Thursday morning, no call.

At 2 o'clock I went into the city, met Tim and Rita Hildebrandt, and we made our way to the 21st Century office. Papers were signed, and I received the first check, made out to Filmline Communications for twenty-five thousand dollars. When I supplied them with the delivery requirements, I got another twenty-five thousand dollar check

Everyone got paid back, everyone made a profit. I thought things were good, but wait, it's not over yet!



Coming soon . . . *The Deadly Spawn* comic book!

For now, let's just talk about a dream come true—my first film getting a theatrical release. I thought, this is it! How can we lose? The film was made so cheaply, even if it totally flopped, we'd make a bloody fortune.

21st Century called me up and asked for my input on the television spots. Television?! I didn't even think about that Newspaper ads, news shows, magazine articles, *The Deadly Spawn* on the marquee above Broadway! Those couple of months in the beginning of 1983 were some of the best times of my life.

I spoke to Sam Raimi again at Studio 16. He had gotten a deal for his film as well. By now he changed the title to *The Evil Dead*. (Sam once told me he was thinking of changing the title from *Book of the Dead* to *The Evil Dead* and what did I think. I told him I liked *Book of the Dead* better . . . go figure!) Sam's film got to the theaters first and caused a sensation.

We finally opened right across the street, nght on Broadway as I had envisioned. Go head to head with Sam. No problem. Another film opened that week as well. I figured it wouldn't do well because it was about dancing or something. The film was *Flashdance*. Between *The Evil Dead* and *Flashdance*, we were buried. We opened and closed in two weeks. In some areas we lasted much longer. 21st had struck around 60 prints and most of them were playing at the end of April 1983. By May 4th, *Variety* had *The Deadly Spawn* 11th on its top grossing list, just beneath *Local Hero* and *The Evil Dead*.

The big headline read: *The Deadly Spawn* opens in fifty theatres, does $320,000 its first week. That's it! We were rich! I could start the next film immediately. Well, guess what? I wasn't rich, and I didn't start the next film anywhere near immediately.

Around this time I began getting my first real lesson in Creative Distribution Practices. Lesson 1: Never rely on a handshake deal. If it's not spelled out in the contract, forget it. For example: I told 21st about my friend that owned a lab. My guy would strike the 35mm prints for about $500 each. They said that was great, if they couldn't get it done cheaper they would give me a call.

Let's skip ahead now to my first Producer's Report. I'm still thinking, low-budget film, $320,000 first week alone, there must be a big check with this report. Oh well, no check in the report, I guess they mail it separately. My eyes scan down the paper. The last figure I see says $60,000 dollars!

OK, that's not too bad, but I thought it would be more. When I place a call to 21st Century to find out if they mailed my check, I am informed the $60,000 is what I owed them! Enough about this . . . it's a book in itself!

But, hey, how many low-budget filmmakers can say they got the chance to see their efforts on the big screen, all over the world? We had a rare chance at the brass ring. We actually got to see what it feels like to be in The Big Show!

The Deadly Spawn was eventually released on VHS through Continental Video. It was a good seller despite the ridiculous name change to *Return of the Alien's Deadly Spawn*. Around this time there was a rumor about an *Alien* sequel. They felt, somehow, people would confuse the two. Yeah, right! I think about a year later Continental went out of business. Later, the film was released on DVD by Synapse. We went back to the original 16mm negative so the DVD had great quality. It also had the few cuts back in that were removed during the 35mm blow up.

Now *The Deadly Spawn* is released on Blu-ray by Elite Entertainment. A lot of the film was shot on outdated stock and was pretty grainy . . . BUT, when it was shot with good stock, and in focus, the Blu-ray looks fantastic! I dug up all sorts of things for the Special Features . . . interviews from 1982, TV shows, casting bloopers, new photos, and an opening video of me with the infamous *Deadly Spawn* hand puppet! This is about as good as the film will ever look . . . unless I get a call from George Lucas and he wants to shoot a 50 million dollar remake!

THE STRANGE CASE OF DOODLES WEAVER

ARTICLE BY JOHNNY LEGEND

When I was just a wee thing in the early 1950s, my parents subjected me to some decidedly "demented" recordings, including Tom Lehrer's first album, some early Stan Freberg, and most significantly, the original 78rpm recording by Spike Jones of "Man on the Flying Trapeze," featuring the inimitable lead vocals of one Winstead "Doodles" Weaver. I was too young to know the difference between Spike and Doodles, but boy, did this make an impression on me. In the late 1960s, courtesy of one of my first friends in the "legit" film business, a film producer and one-time hoofer (worked with Judy Garland, Marilyn, and Mansfield among others) and all-around great guy named Jack Mattis, I was introduced to Doodles and remained friends with him for the next several years.

If Doodles were known only for his film appearances (1936-1981, 140+ credits), appearing alongside Spanky & Alfalfa, Laurel & Hardy, Frances Farmer, Roy Rogers & Dale Evans, Errol Flynn, and Jerry Lewis, and for his appearances in dozens of classic series of the 50s, 60s and 70s, this alone would have been quite a career. But there's a whole lot more to the multi-talented Mister Weaver . . .

Doodles was born Winstead Sheffield Weaver on May 11, 1911, and because of his freckles and big ears, was given the nickname "Doodlebug" by his mother, which he later converted to "Doodles" for his professional career. A student at Stanford University, he worked on the campus humor magazine and engaged in outrageous stunts and practical jokes, the most notorious being the time he painted footsteps on the side of a building leading up to a rooftop window—Stanford spent a small fortune cleaning this up—the next day there were a new set of footsteps leading from the window back to the ground!

Lesser known is that after graduating, Doodles did a complete makeover (glasses, straight-laced suit) and returned to Stanford the next year posing as his own twin brother. Faculty big shots told him he was a much better student than Doodles. He maintained this ruse for quite a while, finally revealing himself to the total bewilderment of everyone. Andy Kaufman would have been proud.

In the 1930s and 40s, he began his amazing film career while simultaneously appearing on radio with Rudy Vallee and performing his manic one-man piano act in nightclubs nationwide. His insane sportscaster persona caught the eye of famous bandleader Spike Jones, and he joined the City Slickers in 1946 and worked with them off and on until Spike's death in 1965.

Doodles biggest fame came in 1948 by taking one of his radio characters, Professor Feetlebaum, and turning him into a racehorse on the immortal Spike Jones recording "William Tell Overture," which reached number six on the national charts. Feetlebaum made a surprise appearance on the follow-up race car recording "Dance of the Hours," and eventually became emblematic of the entire Doodles universe.

In the 1950's, Doodles was all over the place. In 1951, *The Doodles Weaver Show* became the summer replacement for Sid Caesar's *Your Show of Shows* on NBC. The premise of the show was that Doodles had no budget and had to ad lib each episode using leftover sets and costumes from other vacationing series. The "live" pilot for this show has recently resurfaced, financed by the Florida Citrus Growers and featuring mind-boggling sketches with singing orange juice commercials. Also in 1951, Doodles had a temporary parting of the ways with Spike Jones for going completely overboard on e live TV commercial (Mr. Weaver had the dubious honor of being the only band member who was allowed to drink on the road). Doodles also hosted several local children's shows throughout the 50s including *Doodles Club House* and the one I remember, *Doodles Island*, which opened with stock footage of dinosaurs. He was also an early contributor to *Mad Magazine* with his hilarious letter to Abe Lincoln recommending major corrections on the Gettysburg Address. Our man also "doodled" a bit with science fiction, appearing in the October 1950 issue of *Astounding Science Fiction*, along with an early Scientology article by L. Ron Hubbard, and he crafted a strange two-page story from 1957 called "Time and Again, and Overtime."

In 1956, the Los Angeles Jaycees hired Doodles and Vampira (Maila Nurmi) as a fictional couple to spearhead their annual traffic safety campaign. In the only surviving photo, Doodles is getting his first glance at his "future wife," and gets hit by a car while jaywalking!

He also showed up unexpectedly as a "contestant" on *You Bet Your Life*. When Groucho remarked on how clever he was and that he should be in show business, Doodles admitted that he already was.

In the 60s, Doodles came up with the truly astounding, *A Day with Doodles*, a one-season wonder series of six-minute color shorts, featuring only himself with a variety of crazy props and sight gags. He rounded out the decade with guest appearances on *The Monkees*, *Batman*, *Bonanza*, and *Dragnet*.

By the early 70s, I was hanging out with Doodles at his little San Fernando Valley bungalow. He had come up with the fascinating, self-produced *Feetlebaum Returns* LP, 11 brand new tracks of classic Doodle-mania including his rendition of The Beatles' "Eleanor Rigby." Featured on the front black-and-white cover is Pattie Barham, who also joins Doodles on three of the selections as both Pattie Barham and Pancake Pattie. Doodles wouldn't tell me much about her, except that she was a member of the fabled "Barham family" of Hollywood. I always assumed she might have helped out with the financing on the project. Although it wasn't my "field of expertise," I made a game effort to get the album into specialty record stores and the like (no Amazon or eBay in those days).

On a rather chilly night, Doodles noticed I wasn't wearing a jacket. He handed me this great, knee-length peacoat saying, "Take this, I don't need it." I wore that thing proudly for the next several years, until one night on the Sunset Strip, it was literally ripped off my back by some rowdy, drunken passing motorists.

Just for the record, I don't recall him ever mentioning his older brother Sylvester "Pat" Weaver, the legendary TV pioneer who created the *Tonight* and *Today* shows.

One evening, Doodles invited Jack Mattis and me to a screening of his "latest film." We sat in a small screening room and watched an absurd, soft-core opus titled *Massage Parlors*, projected in interlock form (work print and sound track still separate but synchronized). Doodles played some kind of undercover agent with a walkie-talkie disguised as a "vibrator." The film was never released, and I seem to be the only one left who remembers it ever existed.

What a pair! Doodles and Vampira appear together in a traffic safety campaign for the L.A. Jaycees in 1956.

I drove out (along with rockabilly legend Ray Campi) to an early 70s college appearance by the great Doctor Demento to hand-deliver him an autographed copy of *Feetlebaum Returns*. "Eleanor Rigby" became a mainstay on his popular radio series, and Doodles was featured in an on-air interview in 1973. Also courtesy of Campi, I spent an evening with Mae West in her overwhelming Vine Street apartment. Doodles gave me a specially-autographed copy of the LP to bring to her, and she was quite pleased· "Ah, Doodles, always liked that guy . . . How's he doing?"

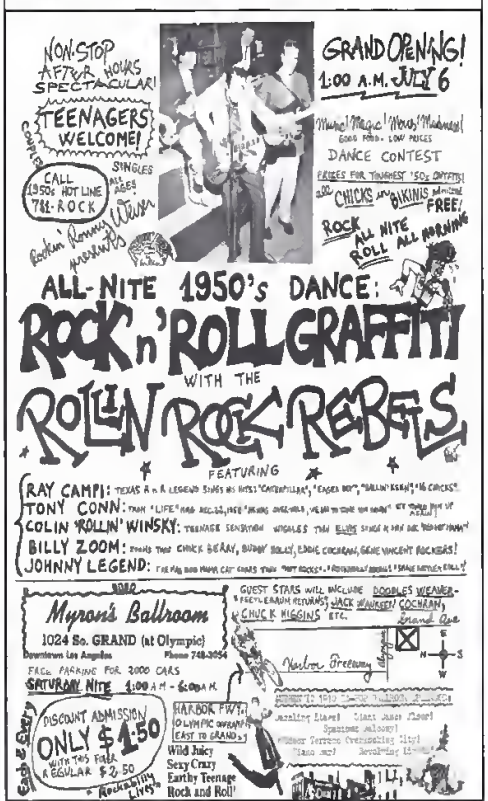
Around this same time, Doodles maintained a regular "gig" at Kelbo's—a classic retro Hawaiian restaurant on Fairfax in West Hollywood with a piano bar—which became my hangout of choice for those precious years. One night I bailed out of a nightmarish sold-out David Bowie and the Spiders from Mars concert at the Hollywood Palladium to the relative "security" of Doodles at Kelbo's.

I moved in with Campi and Rockin' Ronny Weiser at the original home of Rollin' Rock Records in Van Nuys. I bought one of those new-fangled phone answering machines and left a standard greeting. One of the first messages I received was from Doodles, who left a searing, hilarious satire on my own greeting: "HI, this is Johnny Legend, at the sound of the bone, wait a minute, bones don't make any sound . . . and here comes the winner—Be-eep Tone (à la Feetlebaum) . . " I immediately replaced my pedestrian greeting with Doodles' version. The first call I received was from an unsuspecting Ken (Eddie Haskell) Osmond, still a cop with the Van Nuys police department, who left a befuddled message and didn't quite get the joke.

Spike Jones and Doodles.

In 1974 at Rollin' Rock, I politely demanded that we create a fully-functional authentic "rockabilly" band for the first time since the late 50s. We ended up with a self-contained all-star lineup (five lead singers and a drummer) featuring Billy Zoom on lead guitar and vocals, myself and Rollin' Colin Winski on vocals and rhythm guitars, Ray Campi playing the stand-up "slappin'" bass for the first time in his career, Wildman Tony Conn, and drummer Jim Roup. For our world debut, I chose Ledbetters, a small club in Westwood, where I had first unleashed the character of "Johnny Legend" several years earlier. Doodles happily agreed to appear with his stand-up act (minus piano) between our two sets. Zoom, who was still on stage, decided to "help" Doodles out with little guitar-stings (à la a lounge drummer's "Bada-Bings"). After a few of these, Doodles glanced over his shoulder and said, "Hey kid, I work alone . . ." That was that.

Summer of '74, I put together a ridiculously ambitious affair at Myron's Ballroom in downtown Los Angeles, the first late-night (1a.m. to dawn) afterhours show ever attempted, featuring the Rollin' Rock Rebels and guests. Since the auditorium included a separate piano lounge, Doodles came along and flourished in the retro environment. This went on for several weeks and established an afterhours scene downtown that continues to this day!



Doodles prolific film career in the 70s became a cult-lover's dream. It included: *The Zodiac Killer*; a lost marijuana classic *The Big Score* (aka *A Ton of Grass Goes to Pot*); *White House Madness* (Doodles as a Supreme Court Justice); redneck epics *Trucker's Woman* and *Six Pack Annie* (along with Stubby Kaye—written by Rollin' Colin Winski's father Norman Winski—how's that for trivia?); early street gang flick *Cat Murkil & the Silks* (dialog director Larry Hilbrand, my best friend from high school and huge Doodles fan); *Mule Feathers* (starring Rory Calhoun and the voice of Don Knotts); and, *Won Ton Ton: The Dog Who Saved Hollywood*. In 1979, Doodles' niece Sigourney Weaver was busy establishing herself as a major star in *Alien*.

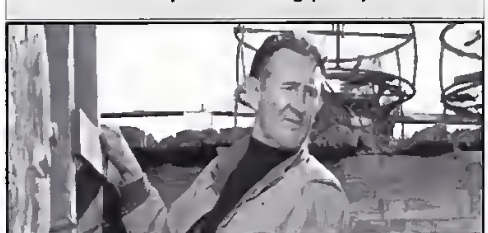
In the later 70s, I fell out of touch with Doodles, being distracted by such activities as the film *Teenage Cruisers*, and my notorious production of the song "Pencil Neck Geek" (another Doctor Demento fave). I began ricocheting back and forth between Hollywood and Venice Beach, and next thing you know it was 1981. Doctor Demento put together a mammoth 10th Anniversary Show at the Country Club in Reseda, with an all-star roster that included Barnes & Barnes, Bobby "Boris" Pickett, Weird 'Al' Yankovic, and of course, Doodles Weaver, who delivered a solid interview and mini-set of "If You Want Some Lousy Cars" and "Eleanor Rigby." The original Doodlebug seemed in good spirits, asked me how "record sales on *Feetlebaum Returns*" were going, and drove off into the night. That was the last time I saw the great man.

In 1981, Doodles made his final film appearances in the munchkin masterpiece *Under the Rainbow* and the alien comedy *Earthbound* starring Burl Ives. I later discovered that in an interview that same year he stated: "Nothing means anything when you're in pain. I have a nice house and an income but not a thing to live for . . ."

Forward to 1983, I was holed up in a hotel room in New York trying to finish the film *My Breakfast with Blassie*, when I received the news that Doodles had committed suicide, shooting himself twice in the chest. He was 71. Rudy Vallee delivered the eulogy at his funeral. I was unaware of his major health issues (including a triple-bypass heart operation), and strange as this may sound, in all the years I knew him, I never saw Doodles take a drink or get too bombed to perform anything less than a great show. No long nights at the bungalow getting plastered or sneaking out to the parking lot for a couple of quick blasts (which I would gladly have joined him on back in those wayward 70s). At the risk of ruffling some feathers, particularly considering the rather absurd concept of shooting yourself in the chest, I briefly imagined that Doodles had used his own demise as a final footnote to the "Man on the Flying Trapeze" legacy: "Bang Bang! You missed! . . . And here comes the winner . . ." May Feetlebaum live forever . . .

Johnny Legend wishes to thank* Glenn Bray, Doctor Demento, Ted Hering, Glen Banks, Rockin' Ronny Weiser, Jack Mattis, Drew Friedman, and Win Weaver *for making this remembrance possible.

Doodles Weaver as Booper Mellish and Mickie Deems as Rabbit Warren in William Castle's *The Spirit Is Willing* (1967).



Doodles plays a cameo role as a fisherman in Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963).

Be careful who you call a dummy . . .

ARTICLE BY BRYAN L. YEATTER

Would you be surprised to learn that one of the biggest stars of film and radio during the 1930s and '40s was not even human? In fact, he wasn't even *alive*—at least, I don't *think* he was. It may seem strange that a ventriloquist act would be a hit in a medium like radio, but for two decades one of the mainstays of the Sunday night radio lineup was the Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy program. As it turns out, McCarthy's persona (yes, I realize I'm making this reference about a dummy) was so strong that people didn't need to see him to be entertained—merely imagining him as he delivered his quips was enough (they don't call it "theater of the mind" for nothing). Besides, on radio, listeners didn't have the distraction of watching Bergen's lips moving while McCarthy talked—Bergen was a terrible ventriloquist.

McCarthy made Bergen a millionaire. Charlie got all the attention—Bergen got all the money. Under the circumstances, Bergen couldn't feel too slighted, not even when McCarthy took top billing—above the title, no less—in the ads for the 1938 film *Letter of Introduction*, while Bergen was relegated to fourth billing. Well, when you get right down to it, who cared about Edgar Bergen? It was McCarthy people wanted to see, and McCarthy received the best lines—as well as all the girls. There were studio publicity photos of him posed romantically, cheek-to-cheek with glamorous Hollywood starlets of the day, or surrounded by giggling chorus girls gazing at him in adoration. He certainly had a way with the women, he was promoted as a dapper, wisecracking, pint-sized ladies man, but the truth is that McCarthy was a nightmarish little freak. Oh, they could fool some people, but it was already known by many that ventriloquist dummies were mildly disturbing at best, and wicked and conniving at their core. I once saw a magazine photo of McCarthy peering into the crib of a sleeping infant. Perhaps they intended for people to believe that Charlie was just pleasantly observing the child, but I knew that wasn't really the case. McCarthy was hungry, and it was obvious that he was contemplating devouring the poor baby. That sweet, innocent child was no more than food to McCarthy. I don't remember for certain, but he may even have been drooling. Or did I imagine that part? Who knows, maybe I imagined the whole awful thing; perhaps it was just one of those fever dreams that gets lodged in your memory banks and stays there throughout your life. If you've ever watched a Charlie McCarthy film, you too may still have disturbing memories of seeing him walking around, children doubling for him in the long shots as he ducked behind a tree or a corner. Do you have children? If you do, I implore you not to let them watch McCarthy's films—you may be unwittingly giving them untold sleepless nights and scarring dreams.

"Of course I've got wood Mae . . . That's all I have!"

Am I making too much of this? Before you answer, contemplate this: If there is nothing inherently wrong with ventriloquist dummies, then how is it that an intelligent, grown man like Anthony Hopkins could be driven to the brink of madness by one? When Hopkins made the film *Magic* in 1978, he took on the part of a ventriloquist named Corky, and before shooting commenced he was encouraged to take the dummy (called "Fats") home to become familiar with how to work it. Fats was designed to resemble Hopkins, so one might have expected the actor—vain as actors tend to be—to develop a certain affection for his new co-star. Instead, as the story goes, Hopkins became unnerved by the staring, smirking little bastard to the point of finally threatening to pitch the dummy into the canyon if somebody didn't come and take it away. Director Richard Attenborough is said to have stepped in to calm the traumatized actor down. Of course, it is known that Hopkins had problems with alcohol, but this in no way exonerates Fats. After all, might not Fats have precipitated Hopkins' climbing further into the bottle? Ventriloquist dummies drive ventriloquists to drink—this is a known fact.

Just look at Michael Redgrave in *Dead of Night* (1945), or Cliff Robertson in his 1962 *Twilight Zone* episode "The Dummy." Oh, the hell Bergen must have endured all those years.

Why are ventriloquists prone to alcoholism? The truth is that they are already individuals with fragile psyches. Let's face it, on average they have to devote half of their personality to these weird-looking, non-living creations. It can apparently take quite a toll on a person with a delicate temperament, which many artistic types tend to have. If the act becomes successful, it is always down to the dummy—the more popular the act becomes, the more attention is thrown on the dummy, thereby expanding this horrid thing's personality even further. Meanwhile, the ventriloquist's personality dissipates. Inevitably, there comes a time when the ventriloquist becomes a non-entity (again, recall Redgrave and Robertson).

Before Charlie McCarthy enacted his diabolical plan to deceive humanity by putting a kinder, gentler face on ventriloquist dummies, it had already been established that dummies were somehow unsettling. Think about it—how often have you seen a dummy that did not belittle, berate, harass, and debase its ventriloquist? It's their way of establishing authority. Eventually, the dummy becomes so dominant that the ventriloquist becomes expendable. The great Lon Chaney managed to hold his own against his sidekick in *The Unholy Three*, first in 1925, then again in the 1930 remake. As Echo the ventriloquist, Chaney was playing a scheming and domineering criminal, hardly the type to succumb to the manipulative tactics of some shaggy-headed, wooden clown. Still, there was one moment at the conclusion of the 1925 version in which a forlorn Chaney watches the love of his life walk away and has to cover his dummy's mouth to silence it. Unfortunately, the scene was not recreated for the 1930 sound remake.

Lon Chaney and friend in *The Unholy Three* (1925).

Chaney's dummy was really no more than a prop in the 1925 *Unholy Three*—much more so in the 1930 remake. The first dummy to play a significant role seems to have been in the 1929 melodrama *The Great Gabbo*. Erich von Stroheim starred as an insufferably boorish ventriloquist whose obnoxious, overbearing personality alienates everyone around him. Von Stroheim's better qualities only seem to find expression through his dummy, Otto, whose gentle and pleasant nature is far more agreeable. For the most part, von Stroheim seems perfectly willing that Otto should receive everyone's affection, but that changes when the woman von Stroheim loves walks out on him. She leaves without even saying goodbye to him, though she does say goodbye to Otto, and even tells the dummy that she always loved him, prompting von Stroheim to lose his mind and assault Otto in a jealous rage.

There is plenty of weirdness in *The Great Gabbo* to make it worthy of mention here. The character is a psychoanalyst's wet dream, and there are a number of scenes in which von Stroheim converses with Otto (even when no one else is present), asking his opinion, even quarreling. It is definitely an interesting case study in the psychological tightrope ventriloquists must walk.

Gabbo Gabbo hey!

But what about Otto? Wasn't he the good guy within the narrative? Wasn't he kind and patient? Didn't he take a bit of the edge off von Stroheim's abrasive personality? Perhaps, but can we be sure this wasn't all a part of Otto's scheme? It is true that most dummies are smart asses who needle the ventriloquist onstage and verbally abuse and bully them in private, and in that sense, Otto is most definitely unique. But perhaps that façade of kindness makes him the most diabolically clever little fiend of all. He knew von Stroheim's weakness—he knew that such an egomaniac could stand to be second fiddle to a dummy for just so long—that all of the adoration heaped on Otto would eventually drive von Stroheim to the brink. And then the ultimate dagger, stealing the heart of the woman von Stroheim longed for—it's evil, just plain *evil*. Otto was definitely a wicked little genius, but he pulled it off; he was able to give the outward appearance of being a benevolent little puppet, and with that his plan was accomplished.

Soon after Otto gave the impression of sweet puppetry, Charlie McCarthy began appearing in short films with Edgar Bergen. They eventually worked their way up to features, and it would seem the spell had been woven; ventriloquist dummies were likeable, funny—at times even charming. McCarthy brought in one of his cronies—affable dunce Mortimer Snerd—and the dummies commenced throwing a party. They had most everyone buffaloed—*most*. But someone must have known the truth, for in 1945 along came the British anthology film *Dead of Night* to break the spell and blow the lid off the ventriloquist dummies' con game.

Dead of Night is a film that can scarcely live up to its considerable reputation. That reputation rests largely on the film's concluding segment, the infamous ventriloquist story starring Michael Redgrave. If the rest of the picture were as compelling, the movie would have no problem supporting its legend. The truth, however, is that the four tales leading up to the ventriloquist segment are highly forgettable fluff by comparison. In watching *Dead of Night*, one can easily get the impression that almost the entire picture is no more than padding, marking time until that last brilliant story.

Mervyn Johns stars as an architect invited to spend the weekend at a country estate to discuss renovations. Upon arriving, Johns is met by a roomful of people, all of whom he claims to have seen in a dream. This revelation starts the group talking about the world beyond, and each has a tale to relate about their own personal experiences with the unknown. The result is a succession of fairly lightweight supernatural stories, but a psychiatrist in the gathering relates the fifth tale, and it turns out to be worth the wait.

Dr. Van Straaten (Frederick Valk) tells the group of having been called in to render an opinion regarding a ventriloquist (Redgrave) being held for attempted murder. As the story unfolds, it is quickly revealed that Redgrave is a nervous wreck, driven to alcoholism and on pins and needles over what his dummy Hugo might say or do. "You don't know what Hugo is capable of," he says wearily at one point. One evening, while working the crowd at a Paris nightclub, the pair meet fellow ventriloquist Hartley Power. Hugo takes an immediate interest in Power, and his behavior can hardly be described as anything less than hitting on him . . . in a way. Hugo talks openly of ditching Redgrave and starting a new act with Power, something that Power takes with amusement, seeing it as a mere gag. But after being invited backstage to the dressing room by Hugo, Power's good humor is put to the test by Redgrave's irrational and paranoid behavior. Some time later, Power runs into Redgrave and Hugo in a London hotel bar and is witness to Redgrave being slugged by a chivalrous man defending his date's honor after Hugo hurls a few snotty insults. Power comes to Redgrave's aid, and as the two are staying at the same hotel, he helps the drunken Redgrave up to his room. Once there, Redgrave spills his guts, confessing that Hugo is driving him mad. After Redgrave passes out, Power returns to his own room, but is awakened later by a pounding at the door. It is Redgrave, who accuses Power of stealing Hugo, and though Power denies the charge, Redgrave finds the dummy there and shoots Power. The tale concludes with Power visiting Redgrave in a mental hospital at the urging of the doctors, who hope to jolt Redgrave back into the real world. But Redgrave is too far gone, and when Power visits him, he finds the disturbed ventriloquist speaking in Hugo's voice.

To this day, what makes *Dead of Night* preeminent among ventriloquist movies is the fact that it never loses its ambiguity regarding Hugo. Although Hugo is shown springing to life and strangling Johns during a closing montage in which all of the film's tales converge in one climactic nightmare, Hugo is never seen operating independent of Redgrave during the actual ventriloquist story. Yet, the film leaves just enough room to wonder. In one scene, Power hears Hugo's voice even when Redgrave is not present in the room, and no evidence is offered to explain how the dummy winds up in Power's hotel room, leading to the confrontation with Redgrave. By maintaining this aura of mystery, the story never allows its bubble to burst.

The Twilight Zone looks to have borrowed heavily from *Dead of Night* as its influence for the 1962 episode "The Dummy." Like Redgrave before him, Cliff Robertson portrays a tormented, alcoholic ventriloquist convinced against all reason that his dummy, Willie, is alive. Though his manager (Frank Sutton) tries to convince Robertson to give up the booze and thereby shake the neurosis, Robertson holds fast to his contention that Willie is adlibbing through the act and using his own material. As is most often the case, the best moments are the subtlest. In the dressing room after his act, with Willie visible in his mirror, Robertson reaches into the desk for his hooch, and when he turns to face the mirror again, he finds Willie has changed position. It is a perfect eerie touch. Although the program does take the leap off the bridge by eventually showing Willie moving autonomously, the ending is so supremely creepy that they manage to pull it off brilliantly. If you really wonder whether *Twilight Zone* drew inspiration from *Dead of Night*, consider that in both stories the ventriloquist is bitten on the hand when trying to silence the dummy—Willie leaves teeth marks on Robertson's hand while Hugo actually draws blood in biting Redgrave.

The Twilight Zone got more mileage out of the concept when they reused the same dummy in the episode "Caesar and Me" in 1964. Jackie Cooper starred as a down-on-his-luck ventriloquist who is goaded by his dummy, Caesar, into turning to a life of crime. It doesn't end well for Cooper. It would be redundant to say the episode was entertaining (all of the vintage episodes of the series were), but entertaining or not, it could in no way equal the Robertson episode. The reason is simple. there was absolutely no uncertainty regarding Caesar—he is shown right from the start to be a living entity (though it is never explained how), and without that mystique to fuel it the story never establishes that nervous atmosphere. It might be amusingly odd, but not especially creepy.

A good example of how useful it can be to lend the dummy an enigmatic quality would be the 1962 German murder story *Dummy of Death*. Nowhere in that film is the dummy (named Grog) seen to move autonomously, nor is there any evidence suggesting it would even be possible, yet the dummy remains a disquieting presence throughout, propped up in a chair, upsetting the characters with its weird glare. Without blinking an eye, Grog managed a better creep-out quotient in a few scenes than Caesar could accomplish with an entire episode of a program as venerable as *The*

Creepy Caesar from the *Twilight Zone* episode, "Dummy Doll".

Twilight Zone. Grog had a definite advantage, however, as the filmmakers in that instance chose to make him a vaguely ominous presence rather than the obnoxious chatterbox Caesar turned out to be in *Twilight Zone*.

The truth is, it's not easy to take a concept as limited as an animated puppet and stretch it out to feature length without losing the most striking element of such a narrative—its mystery. Once that mystery is gone, you're left with nothing but a talking puppet, and that can turn silly very quickly. This has been demonstrated by most latter-day entries in the genre, which blow their wad far too early, and have nothing left but to serve up the ridiculous sight of a rampaging doll. This is precisely why the *Child's Play* films were such chronic artistic failures. Though not a ventriloquist's dummy, Chucky was close enough to illustrate the point that a foul-mouthed, wisecracking toy wielding a knife is not scary for long—it becomes a joke all too soon. At twenty minutes, the Redgrave segment in *Dead of Night* was compact enough to maintain its integrity to the last, while the Robertson episode of *Twilight Zone* could likewise hold out until the final moments to give way to their talking dummy, not leaving enough time for it to lose its effect.

Kudos, then, to those films that could draw the idea out to feature length and still maintain interest—there weren't many. In 1964, the British film *Devil Doll* managed to keep one's attention by offering a unique twist on the theme. On that occasion, it was the dummy who was the victim, and the ventriloquist the villain. Bryant Haliday starred as the Great Vorelli, a ventriloquist/hypnotist/magician who also practices the black arts. Through some nondescript bit of sorcery, Vorelli manages to transfer a man's soul into his puppet, which makes for quite a stage act as the dummy wows the audience by hopping from Vorelli's lap and walking to the front of the stage to take a bow. The rest of the act is less than stellar, consisting mostly of cruelty and humiliation on Vorelli's part as he hypnotizes people and makes them think they are about to be shot in the head, or, as in the continental version, has shy, reserved women perform striptease acts (pretty sure a lawsuit would come from that). Otherwise, the Great Vorelli berates his dummy, Hugo, rubbing his nose in the fact that, as a dummy, he can't enjoy a

DEVIL DOLL (1957).

glass of wine or a slice of ham, which the audience applauds enthusiastically.

Hugo may be the victim in all of this, but that isn't to say he is innocent. He does, after all, commit a senseless murder, stabbing Vorelli's assistant to death in her bed for no discernible reason. Perhaps this homicidal proclivity is why Vorelli keeps Hugo in a cage, but that seems fairly pointless, as the dummy frequently manages to slip out of his confine, and thereby eventually gives Vorelli his comeuppance. Again, it's the little moments that work best, for instance, seeing Hugo sitting silently in his cage, his eyes following Vorelli around the room. On the downside, Hugo does get around quite a bit, which becomes less chilling with each amble. Nonetheless, it remains one of the more unique approaches to the theme.

On the subject of unique approaches, two episodes of *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* deserve mention. A 1956 episode titled "And So Died Riabouchinska," cast Claude Rains as a ventriloquist ratted out for murder by his puppet. Though policeman Charles Bronson singles Rains out as his prime suspect when a corpse turns up in the basement of a theater, he is unable to crack the case until Rains' dummy, in this case fashioned after a beautiful woman (the Riabouchinska of the title), spills the beans. Though the doll professes to love Rains dearly, she stabs him in the back all the same (is there anything as cutting as the betrayal of a woman?). Perhaps it was a tip of the hat to Edgar Allan Poe, as Rains definitely seems to succumb to the imp of the perverse.

The 1957 episode "The Glass Eye," features a tale related by no less than William Shatner, who tells the story of how his sister (Jessica Tandy) had her heart broken irreparably as a result of living life as a ventriloquist's groupie. Tandy followed ventriloquist Tom Conway across Europe, and got the shock of her life upon finally meeting him.

After *Devil Doll*, there was a lull among ventriloquist dummies that lasted more than a decade, but when they did swing back into action, they did so with e vengeance. To date, 1978's *Magic* is the last film of real consequence to deal with the subject. Anthony Hopkins was cast as Corky, a struggling magician who has a reversal of fortune when he brings a dummy named Fats into the routine and makes the switch to ventriloquism. Together, Corky and Fats are on the verge of sterdom when their manager, Mo Green (Burgess Meredith), tells Corky that he will need to take a physical to be cleared for a network television special. Corky's reaction is more than a little hysterical—he not only balks at the idea of taking the physical, but throws quite a tantrum and goes into hiding, running off to the Catskills to look up his old high school crush Peggy (Ann-Margret). Peg's husband is away, so Corky takes the opportunity to act on fifteen years of unrequited love, and it goes so well that he decides to forego stardom and live a quiet and anonymous life with his dream girl. Of course, Fats will have none of that, and animosity quickly surfaces between ventriloquist and dummy. When Mo Green turns up and walks in on a very heated argument between Corky and Fats, poor Corky is prodded by Fats into doing the unthinkable and committing a string of violent acts in order to keep their secret.

Outwardly, *Magic* is an effective depiction of one man's spiral into madness, but Fats' presence lends the story an edge of uncertainty, and just enough reason for speculation on the part of the viewer to take the narrative to another level. If you think that what you are watching is nothing more than schizophrenia, director Richard Attenborough decided to cross the audience up with a brief shot that gives one pause for thought. During a discussion between ventriloquist and dummy as Corky's descent accelerates, Hopkins sets the dummy aside on the sofa and walks away. The camera holds on Fats after Hopkins walks out of frame, and just before the shot changes we see Fats' eyes move, and he then blinks.

Ventriloquist Dennis Alwood was hired to work Fats through much of the film, but was naturally positioned out of view (behind furniture or, as he put it, crouching behind Ann-Margret's behind—nice work if you can get it); it was Alwood who inadvertently made Fats move after Hopkins had walked away, and upon seeing the footage, he asked Attenborough if he planned to tighten the scene up and switch to the next shot before Fats appeared to move on his own. But Attenborough chose to leave it in, and was curious to see if anyone would notice. People did, and but for that brief shot, one could easily dismiss *Magic* as merely a story about a neurotic entertainer. Fats almost got away with it.

Like *Dead of Night* before it, what makes *Magic* compelling is the element of ambivalence about the dummy—remove that and you fairly well drain the scenario of much of its power. Aside from the element of abstruseness, a key ingredient, if the diabolical dummy motif is to truly work, seems to be a certain tension between ventriloquist and puppet. Without that struggle, without that antagonistic interaction and the friction it provides, it is all too easy for things to disintegrate and collapse into parody. Any filmmaker delving into the genre (sub-genre, if you like) needs to begin with the understanding that conceptually it is psychological and does not easily lend itself to the physical nature of contemporary horror, which has a decided preoccupation with torture, dismemberment, and all things repugnant. Removing the struggle between ventriloquist and puppet takes away the core element of the premise. Can a film succeed without that tension? Maybe, but more modern examples of the idea don't bear this out.

Take, for instance, the 1995 home movie *The Dummy*. Obviously made by fans of the slasher genre, the movie disposes with the ventriloquist altogether and tries to have a puppet take the place of Mike Meyers or Jason Vorhees. The dummy is inhabited by a demonic spirit summoned by a fortuneteller seeking revenge against a couple of newlyweds who have offended her. The fortune teller orders the dummy to kill anyone who so much as talks to the couple, which the dummy dutifully (and silently) does.

Even if one were to set aside the movie's horribly amateurish execution, it would still be a failure, since the dummy has zero personality and is therefore in no way frightening. This really gets to the heart of the matter as far as addressing what exactly is disturbing about ventriloquist dummies. They cannot be physically frightening, because they are not the least bit imposing. What gives them their edge is the psychological cruelty they inflict on those poor souls, who, in essence, give them life. Their domination over their presumed masters, the inhuman delight they take in humiliating and mentally dismantling the ones who give them speech, even the simple idea that they would be secretly capable of such things—*this* is what is disturbing. Having them physically attack people, moving ridiculously like knife-wielding marionettes is simply idiotic. It takes an artist to pull off so outrageous a concept, but between sequels, remakes, and bloodbaths, who really has the chops to accomplish that anymore? *Saw* director James Wan took the idea on with *Dead Silence* (2007), but the best he could do was deliver a ghost story with an array of ventriloquist dolls as adornments. Considering Wan's meal ticket, it should surprise no one that the film expended all its creative energy in depicting nauseating physical horror. Such a tactless presentation could easily be construed as artistic cowardice.

They don't get much creepier than 1978's *Magic*.

There is obviously still something unsettling in the concept, otherwise it would not continue to crop up. Even so, more recent attempts have been mostly far astray. One of the more interesting entries was Chester L. Turner's *Black Devil Doll from Hell* (1984), which offered an ethnic take on the subject. Eschewing the ventriloquist angle, Turner showed that dolls could be disturbing on their own (at least to a degree). Everything about this one—the poor 1980s video photography, low sound quality, sometimes odd performances, amateur film score (Somebody got a Casio for Christmas!)—screams home movie, yet there is a strange quality to it, an uncomfortable voyeuristic overtone that goes a long way toward notching a creep-out factor well above what the dummy could deliver on its own. Perhaps this is because we hadn't seen sex dragged into the puppet scenario before.

Shirley L. Jones was cast as a devoutly religious, sexually repressed woman who comes across a ventriloquist doll in a curio shop. The shopkeeper explains that the doll is known to grant people their innermost secret desires, and since the movie has spent its opening minutes establishing the extent of Jones' religious convictions and her asexual existence, we know where this is going. After taking the dummy home, Jones is shocked to realize she is falling under some spell, and can't believe it when she finds herself masturbating in the shower. Upon exiting the shower, she is jumped by the dummy and awakens to find herself nude and tied spread-eagle on the bed with the dummy looking down on her. In predictably coarse language, the dummy announces his intentions before climbing on top of Jones and giving her the ride of her life. After the deliriously ridiculous spectacle of Jones writhing in ecstasy while being humped by a puppet, the film (actually shot-on-video) regains its composure nicely when Jones awakens wondering if it was all just a bizarre dream. But after accepting the reality of the experience, she searches the apartment for her puppet/lover. Unable to find him, she becomes frustrated and begins bringing home human lovers, none of whom can satisfy her. She eventually finds the dummy back at the same curio shop and brings it home again, where she pleads with it to show her what's good. The dummy is initially unresponsive, and the movie would have been wise to leave it at that, thereby allowing the viewer to speculate as to whether or not it all really happened or was simply a freaky sexual fantasy. Unfortunately, the movie cops out with what is clearly intended to be a grandiose climax, but instead falls very flat.

Chester Turner's incredibly bizarre *Black Devil Doll from Hell* (1984).

The ending is not the only time Turner shows a lack of artistic intuitiveness. When Jones first brings the dummy home, she props it up on the commode (not in a crass or suggestive manner, merely putting it there to set it aside) as she gets in the shower. As she begins to masturbate, we see the dummy turn its head and open its eyes to look, its mouth agape while watching her. This is *Black Devil Doll' From Hell*'s big mistake—it isn't creepy, just comical. A smarter filmmaker would have realized how this would diminish the effect of what is supposed to be occurring. How better it would be to have the audience and the character make startling or disquieting discoveries together, showing the audience something that Jones is unaware of only denies the opportunity to engage the viewer's imagination and sense of wonder. Incidentally, the movie received a remake of sorts in in 2007 with the title *Black Devil Doll*, but it can't compare to Chester Turner's made-on-the-cheap opus.

Sadly, the ventriloquist puppet motif seems to have been running on fumes for a long time now. The lack of inspiration comes through in even the titles. There was *The Dummy*, a 1982 short film that received considerable airplay as a late night filler piece on USA Network during the 1980s. It depicted a woman being chased around her apartment by her husband's ventriloquist dummy for seven-and-a-half minutes. Speaking of schizophrenia, the film couldn't decide on terror or whimsy, and wound up with a thoroughly awkward mix of the two. In the 2000 vanity production *The Dummy*, writer/ director/ producer/star Keith Singleton was at least smart enough to retain the ambiguity regarding his dummy Tommy, and whether or not it was really alive. On the downside, Singleton had neither the skills nor the charisma to carry the project himself. Then in 2005 there was—Are you ready for this?—*The Dummy*. On that occasion, a man manages to get locked in a theater with a dummy (oh, the horror!). As uninventive as the titles are, they still trump *Triloquist*, an awful horror/satire released in 2008.

If one looks at the genre's best offerings, it would seem that the concept is altogether too nuanced for today's filmmakers to manage. Trying to make slashers of puppets is a lame approach, yet this is what we seem to be left with. The truth is, there is still enough weirdness in the idea to wring some shudders from it. The DVD release of *Magic* included an interview with ventriloquist Dennis Alwood, in which he described a most curious phenomenon occasionally experienced by some in his profession. It occurs when a ventriloquist is deep in his routine, and suddenly the dummy will say something that will even take the ventriloquist by surprise. It sounds altogether impossible, but it happens enough that psychiatrists have tagged it with the term "spontaneous schizophrenia." Now *that*'s creepy!

Bryan L. Yeatter would like to thank Chris Kellum, Al Val, and Jeff Yeatter for their help in making this article possible.

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NIGHTBIRDS

Andy Milligan's lost film takes flight on Blu-ray

Article by Stephen Thrower

Way back in 1981,, I read an intriguing article about a director called Andy Milligan, whose filmography included such mouth-watering delicacies as *Torture Dungeon*, *Bloodthirsty Butchers* and *The Ghastly Ones*. The grimy stills, the lurid poster artwork, all seemed to promise some kind of thrillingly degenerate butcher-shop orgy, so when I caught up with Milligan's films in the mid-1980s, I was primed for mayhem on an epic scale.

But as I soon found out, the truth about Milligan is far, far stranger than gore. Imagine, if you will, a delinquent theatrical impresario who's decided to make horror film versions of *The Old Dark House* or *Richard the Third* in his cluttered suburban home, with a camera last used for shooting newsreel footage of the Cuban Missile Crisis. In defiance of minuscule budgets, he's chosen to set his films in period, with characters bustling around in medieval finery, looking for all the world as if they've raided the clothes hamper of an impoverished weekly rep' theatre. Fleeting glimpses of putty and chicken-liver stand in for gore effects, the hackneyed story lines are a tangle of complicated detail, and the music sounds as if it's been stolen from a pre-war weepie. The occasional slab of shirtless rough trade poses among the cast, chosen, one suspects, for reasons other than his mumbled line readings. The rest of the cast, declaiming reams of melodramatic dialogue, are caked with enough slap to shame Bette Davis in *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?*, and the whole shebang is photographed with such reckless, whirling haste, it's a wonder the actors didn't chip their teeth on the camera.

And yet, even as I marveled, I knew that Andy Milligan's work was widely regarded by horror fans as simply *too* cheap, *too* rotten . . . too *wrong*. Michael Weldon, author of the seminal exploitation bible *The Psychotronic Encyclopedia of Film,* concluded a review of *The Ghastly Ones* by asserting, "If you're an Andy Milligan fan, there's no hope for you."

Michael Weldon's eyes must be popping now, as no less an august institution than the British Film Institute rolls out the red carpet for a double bill of Milligan madness on Blu-ray. The occasion for this 'triumph of the no-hopers' is the entry into the home entertainment arena of one of Milligan's least known, least talked about, yet most accomplished titles, *Nightbirds*, along with his subsequent vampire movie. *The Body Beneath*. Both are well worth your time, but you'll need to know more about *Nightbirds*—after all, *The Body Beneath* has been available for many years from Something Weird Video.

For all the ballyhoo I've just given the Milligan oeuvre, *Nightbirds* is, to tell you the truth, quite a different sort of film to those cheap and grisly shockers that William Mishkin so avidly paraded down 42nd Street. This melancholy tale of a young homeless man who falls under the spell of a possessive, controlling woman was the first of five films Andy Milligan made during an eighteen-month sojourn in Great Britain at the tail end of the 1960s, and it's a downbeat psychodrama quite unlike any of his other surviving films. Instead of the customary sense of barely controlled panic rampaging before the lens of Milligan's camera, *Nightbirds* is stably built around two affecting and committed lead performances, by Berwick Kaler as Dink and Julie Shaw as Dee.

The result owes much to Milligan's roots as a director and writer in off-Broadway theatre. While not quite an example of that dreaded thing, the filmed play, it's easy to imagine this being acted out on stage at the tiny Caffe Cino in New York, the legendary theatre specializing in rough-hewn cutting-edge drama where Milligan cut his dramatic teeth in the early 1960s. With a carefully choreographed scenario played out by a small cast, it has more in common with Milligan's debut short, *Vapors* (1965), than the later horror films for which he's better known. In hectic, delirious works such as *The Ghastly Ones* (1968) and *Torture Dungeon* (1970), Milligan stuffed his scripts with wall-to-wall dialogue, but here his dizzying verbal excess is under careful restraint. The camerawork, undertaken as always by the director himself, is likewise much calmer; instead of hurling the 16mm Auricon camera around the room to catch the maximum amount of dialogue with the minimum number of cuts, he establishes an almost classical construction of close-ups and establishing shots.

Consequently, a sadness and stillness is allowed to build. The sparsity, with no more than three speaking characters in a scene at any one time, is partly determined by limited finance, but more importantly it's an outcome of the story, which looks at the way abusive lovers can separate partners from friends and social contact. *Nightbirds* was shot in and around the Spitalfields area of East London (Jack the Ripper territory), and the surrounding streets have a down-at-heel shabbiness that's only partly due to the grainy photographic blow-up from 16mm to 35mm. Rainy pavements, crumbling brickwork, and grimy storefronts proliferate, in what was and still is primarily an import-export hub for the textile industry. Unglamorous, rarely filmed, and conveniently devoid of tourists and passersby on weekday evenings and Sundays, the Commercial Street area is a perfect choice for a downbeat story of isolation and deprivation.

At the core of the film is a portrait of an unequal power relationship, with the female in the dominant role and the male as hapless victim. This is a 'love affair' in which the young male partner desires nurture and protection; Milligan's screenplay likens him to a wounded pigeon he finds in the street (indeed, the film was originally to have been called "Pigeons"). Helpless and broken, the bird requires a quasi-parental caregiver to save it, and Dink, who rescues it from the gutter, has an instinctive desire to play that role to the creature. Underlying his 'mother-bird' compassion is the acting-out of a nurturing relationship in miniature, demonstrating what he himself is looking for. Dee, however, seizes upon this emotional need as a means to exert control.

The story unfolds over two or three weeks, but in that time Dee 'rescues' Dink from a life on the streets, embroils him in a fantasy world of love and devotion, then psychologically abuses him. His inexperience with women means she can mold him to her wishes, and his need for affection is easily manipulated by sex. At first, this emerges as simply Dee's dominant sexuality, of a sort that any adventurous couple might explore, but for Dee, sexual power is not enough. Instead she uses psychological games to fuse the notion of love with surrender to another's will. Dink is easy meat, thanks to his naivetè and an air of arrested development that hovers on the border of 'simpleness'. I say on the border, because Milligan is careful to show that it's not quite as 'simple' as that. Dink calls his pet pigeon Homer, an educated pun that suggests intelligence and wit. Emotionally, however, he's still very much a child; he responds to the barbs and twists of Dee's emotional manipulation with a flinching and curling of the body, a tendency to go and stand in the corner or twist to face the wall. Milligan suggests, through Dink's reminiscences about his family, that the root of this fragility is his bad relationship with his mother.

Berwick Kaler is a marvelously compelling performer in this, his first appearance in front of a movie camera. A Newcastle-born actor who arrived in London with only minor experience in stage acting beforehand (mostly in regional variety shows), he's basically a raw talent here, but he's alive to the possibilities of the role and makes the character fly. He soaked up Milligan's direction avidly, and today regards his time on *Nightbirds* as a valuable lesson in the essentials of screen acting. Everything about him, from his furrowed brow to his gently elongated nose, his soft speech and his careful deportment, adds a touch of delicate oddness to the film. Kaler himself says that he was far more outgoing and confident than the character of Dink, so his evocation of this shy dropout is entirely constructed, but he gives Milligan a naturally thoughtful performance and shows genuine screen presence. Today the lynchpin of his current career is the stage—writing, directing, and starring as the UK's leading pantomime Dame in an annual pantomime show at the York Theatre Royal that's been pulling in family audiences by the thousands since the mid-1980s. I interviewed him recently at his home, and discovered a man who may not have made it big as a screen actor, but who can count on a cheery greeting all around the historic city of York. (And I'm not quite sure how to fit this in to this article, but he's lifelong pals with 1970s rocker Suzi Quatro! How's that for a non sequitur?)

Andy Milligan's *The Body Beneath* (1970) is featured as a bonus film on BFI's *Nightbirds* Blu-ray.

Little is known about Julie Shaw, except that she also appeared as a young lesbian in *The Killing of Sister George* and played a small role in Pete Walker's crime drama *The Big Switch*. She's thoroughly chilling as Dee, revealing in steady increments the cruelty, scorn, and love of power that Dink mistakes for love. The look in her eyes as she quickly works out how easy it will be to have fun at his expense is chilling; she's like a cat spotting a sparrow with a limp. No need to give chase; a smorgasbord of sadistic amusement is spread out like a buffet. Dee is relentlessly mean and conniving, even during sex. During one clinch, in which Dink sinks to the floor and begins to lick her feet, she deliberately punctures his worshipful mood by demanding, "What are you *doing*?" Later, on the roof, she suddenly announces, "I want to worship you," before positioning the confused young man in a Christ-like pose and crouching at his feet, reaching for him like some supplicant in a religious painting. The absurdity of this simulated power-reversal—Dink protests, "I feel foolish!"—serves to fix in the young man's mind the idea that he can only play the submissive role, never the dominant. Milligan creates, with the character of Dee, a portrait of quiet psychopathy. Standing outside of emotional situations, observing and looking for ways of gaining mastery, she demonstrates that chilling lack of empathy and concern for others that makes possible the crimes of a serial killer (or investment banker). An exchange on the telephone in the latter stages reveals the extent of Dee's lies about her background, and also seems to hint at something even worse . . .

Berwick Kaler, February 2012.

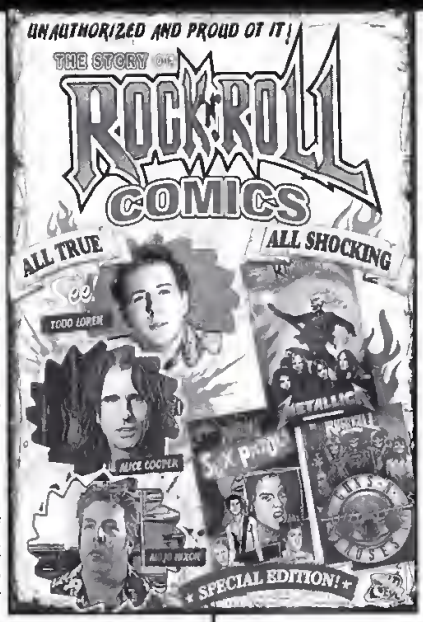
Misogyny is frequently apparent in Milligan's work. Although the roots and complexities of his anger towards women cannot be adequately summarized here, suffice to say that the tone was dictated by the relationship he endured in childhood with his smothering, aggressive mother, Marie Gladys Milligan. In Jimmy McDonough's brilliant biography, *The Ghastly One*, Andy's sister Louise recalls their mother, obsessed with imagined infidelities, chasing their father around the house with a kitchen knife while the children cowered in a bedroom. Further stones of childhood transgressions and transgressors of childhood are discussed in detail by McDonough; however, you don't have to peer too hard between the lines to surmise that Andy may have suffered sexual abuse. Thanks to the poisonous family atmosphere, his homosexual identity was colored by hatred; far from revering momma, he loathed her, giving vent to his rage in film after film. His feelings, however warped, were borne of real pain, so it would be grotesque to demand that Milligan paint *both* the lead characters in *Nightbirds* as rotten, just so that we can paddle the film into the less controversial waters of out-and-out misanthropy. However, one has to say that when it comes to the battle of the sexes, this portrait of an innocent male destroyed by an evil woman is as black and white as its film stock. Perhaps one simple point *against* Milligan is all we need to make here: when he ordered Julie Shaw to throttle the pigeon we see in the film, in preparation for the creature's death scene, the actress refused to do it, appalled at the suggestion. Milligan, disappointed in his leading lady, wrung the bird's neck himself . . .

There are other flaws in the film, chiefly the scripting, which sometimes lacks the sophistication it's groping for. There's an earnestness to the whole enterprise too, which carries a whiff of 1950s American stage writing, the sort of exaggerated wannabe-psychodrama that flourished in the wake of Tennessee Williams. At times you might say that the simple narrative is being freighted with a seriousness the material can't quite support. That said, this is one of those ineffably sad little melodramas that seem tailor-made to be watched on a rainy Sunday afternoon, with the windows rattling in their frames and the wind whistling in the eaves, and it shows another side to Andy Milligan, a sorely undervalued filmmaker whose work is as distinctive as it is bizarre.

THE STORY OF ROCK 'N' ROLL COMICS

New DVD documents the short and four-color life of comic book publisher and First Amendment crusader Todd Loren and his band of Rock 'N' Roll outlaws—who took on the music business—and won.

ARTICLE BY GREG PRATO



Several names are almost always linked with First Amendment rights—Lenny Bruce, George Carlin, Howard Stern, 2 Live Crew, etc. However, one figure is often overlooked in the records of free speech battles—and that is Todd Loren, who was best known for creating Revolutionary Comics, and its popular *Rock 'N' Roll Comics* series. Now, Loren gets a little of his own well-deserved screen time in the new DVD, *The Story of Rock 'N' Roll Comics*, from Wild Eye Releasing. Directed by Ilko Davidov (*William S. Burroughs: A Man Within* and *Children in Exile*), the 80-minute documentary also features interviews with Todd's father, Herb Shapiro, as well as fellow co-workers and former employees, plus rock industry insiders like Alice Cooper and Mojo Nixon.

"I had seen the comic books at newsstands early on," recalls Davidov, "And then my first encounter with somebody that worked with them was at an art gallery, here in Chicago. I met Scott Jackson, who did most of the covers, and he told me the story briefly. I thought it would be a good story for a documentary, and it was very interesting. I did a short interview with him over the next week, and tried to shop the project around, did some more research, spoke to some more people to see where it goes. For a while, it didn't go anywhere, until I got a call from a journalist from England, Ian Shirley, who was writing a book on comics and music, and also an article for *Mojo* magazine. He called me and said, 'I saw on your website you're working on this project.' From then on, he put me in contact with Todd's father [Herb Shapiro], who he had interviewed already, and that gave it the spark to move forward. A week later, I had discussed it with my producers, Chris Swider and Carmine Cervi, and we went to Florida and interviewed Herb, who put us in touch with the rest of the people. It took a while, but we did track down a lot of them."

And as Mojo Nixon (who received his own entry in the *Rock 'N' Roll Comics* line—one of the few to be actually "authorized") says, the doc touches upon all the necessary elements to perk up the average viewer's interest. "It's got rock n' roll, it's got comedy, and it's got a murder mystery! Most people who like rock n' roll also like comics. Y'know, *what is Kiss?*"

As the documentary explains, Loren got his start in the 1980's by opening up a San Diego, CA-based rock n' roll merchandise store, Musicade. And although the store was doing well financially, Loren's true passion was to launch a line of comic books that told the story of rock and pop's biggest names. "He was actually still brainstorming *Rock 'N' Roll Comics* when we first met, around 1988," recalls Jay Allen Sanford, who would eventually become one of Loren's "go to" illustrators. "I ended up going to work for him—a couple of previous businesses, selling rock memorabilia. I actually didn't think it was that good sounding of an idea, doing real life stories of rock bands. But he proved me wrong, and I ended up jumping aboard as of the second issue."

What soon followed were comics that featured Guns N' Roses, Metallica, Kiss, The Beatles, Pink Floyd, Nirvana, and New Kids on the Block, among countless others. The only problem was that some artists were supportive—and some were not. "The comic books were published without authorization from the actual subjects of the stories," explains Davidov. "And they were biographies of real people. A lot of the subjects were not happy that they were portrayed in a comic book—some of the things that they did or the way they were portrayed wasn't flattering at times. For the most part, they didn't have that much of a problem with it—but their licensing companies and merchandising companies, which represented record labels, were not happy about this, because they felt that this is an infringement, that this is 'merchandise,' and comic books are merchandise. The problem was that they thought they were losing money by not publishing those books themselves—somebody else was exploiting the name of the celebrity and making money on that. So they put a cease and desist on quite a few of the titles in the beginning. They didn't end up going to court—they just stopped them from being distributed.

"When the New Kids on the Block comic book came out, they got a threatening letter again from their lawyers, that said, 'You cannot publish this,' and Todd and his father decided to go to court and prove they had the right to . . . In the end, all the information that was in any of those books was already published—the writers did their research based on articles from the press and other biographies. So it was not anything that wasn't already available. Todd ended up winning the case for the most part, because they were able to prove that comic books were not merchandise, but they're similar to other forms of journalism or literature. You can publish an unauthorized biography of many of those people, and also write an article without their permission in the press. So that was the importance on the ruling in that case."

But as Sanford recalls, it was a long and arduous process. "They practically had a bench with our name carved in it in the courthouse at one point! It was a constant thing in the early days. We got sued for various matters that had to do with Bon Jovi, Mötley Crüe. Injunctions that prevented us from doing issues on Judas Priest and Skid Row. The Skid Row issue had actually already been drawn and solicited. It was supposed to be 'number eight.' There is no number eight—there's a number seven and then there's a number nine—because Skid Row successfully blocked us from putting that out. It all came to a head with New Kids on the Block, though. They sued us as of our twelfth issue. That was the first time that it went all the way through, getting a judge to make a declaratory judgment at the end of the case, that stated—definitively—whether a company can do comic books about real people, without infringing their rights to their images. And it came down in our favor. After that, we still got lawsuit threats, but we wouldn't even offer a settlement—we'd show them the New Kids judgment, and they'd generally whimper and go away. Or make a noise in the press—which would make us sell comic books. But we spent a lot of time in court. Todd claimed that he spent about $30,000 fighting the New Kids case."

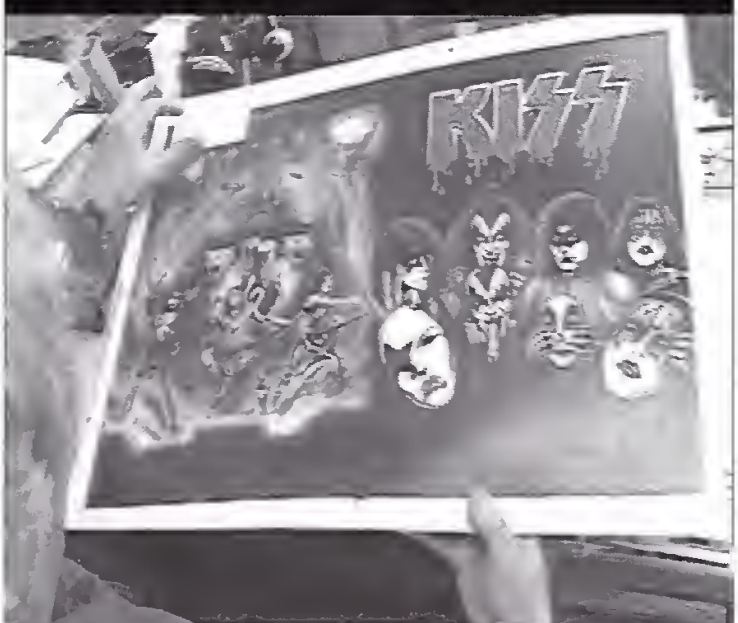
Still crazy after all these years: Mojo Nixon.

Playing devil's advocate, Mojo Nixon brings up a good point. "If I do a comic book about ZZ Top, does ZZ Top have to authonze it? If you did a story on ZZ Top, do they have to authorize it? I'm sure ZZ Top would *like* to authorize it if you did a story, but they don't have to. So there's a legitimate question there. I think the problem with all these kinds of legal questions is that the big guy can always hire enough lawyers to make you say 'Uncle.' Even if you're right, under the current legal system, whoever can hire the most lawyers can get the most justice. That's what I liked about Todd—he was ready to take the battle on.

"In the documentary, people say 'Todd was an asshole.' I thought he was a great guy, although, he wanted to do a comic book about me, so that might have clouded my vision. But I liked the idea, because when bands become corporations and they hire lawyers, it's not really rock n' roll anymore. It's not like Todd was living in La Jolla in a beachfront house. In fact, I went to his house—he was living in Hillcrest, right behind a place I used to live. He was living in a modest, little apartment. He didn't have a zillion dollars. I liked the fact that he was saying, 'Look, I can make these comics . . . and you can't do a thing about it.' When Irving Azoff calls you and threatens to sue you, nine out of ten people roll over. They roll over because not only does he know leg-breakers, he knows $500-an-hour lawyers. And so most people give in. Todd didn't. That's what I liked about him."

Alice Cooper is featured in the documentary *The Story of Rock 'N' Roll Comics*, now on DVD from Wild Eye Releasing.

Rock 'N' Roll Comics creator Todd Loren was stabbed to death at his home in June 1992. He was 32. His murderer has never been found.



Artwork for a KISS edition of *Rock 'N' Roll Comics*.

Loren certainly didn't give in, and *Rock 'N' Roll* Comics was free to carry on their merry way. But not all the artists opposed being selected for the series, such as Kiss. In the documentary, a phone call from Kiss singer/bassist Gene Simmons can be heard, in which he is clearly a fan of their work. "[Kiss] were very receptive, actually," remembers Sanford. "'Number twelve' was the first time we did a story that was an overview of their entire career. It wasn't really that good of an issue, but apparently it impressed Gene enough that he contacted Revolutionary, and we subsequently did four more comics. We did one called 'Kiss: Tales from the Tours,' which they sat down with us. We met in LA several times and went to Gene Simmons' birthday party, did several different interviews, and based the comic around their best ten or twelve different tour tales. Then we did a three issue series, that was straight biographical from their growing up to . . . I forget what album, but they still had the makeup on as of the third issue when it wrapped up. And he was real supportive. He wore the *Rock 'N' Roll Comics* t-shirt in magazine spreads, and in all the videos from *Kiss Alive III*, he's wearing our *Hard Rock Comics* shirt. It was like having a rock star in the camp—it was great."

But what seemed like a promising future for Loren as an accidental renaissance man came to an abrupt halt on June 11, 1992, when he was brutally stabbed to death in his San Diego apartment, aged only 32. Still to this day, there has been no arrest made in the killing.

Davidov: "A lot of it isn't clear. He was stabbed to death in '92. It's not known if it was an intruder or somebody that he knew. The murder is still unsolved—we are hoping that this film will also help keep this story alive and we're hoping that it will be solved some day. There has been speculations that Andrew Cunanan, who was a serial killer—he killed a lot of gay men— there is some evidence that they knew each other and it might have been one of Cunanan's first murders. But again, that's a speculation and it can't be really proved—there were some articles to that effect in the press. If this film helps in any way to shed some more light on that mystery, that would be great. Or at least keep that investigation alive, because it's been a long time, and the more time that passes, the harder it will be to find out what really happened."

Sanford: "There's a school of thought that says that [Loren and Cunanan] probably knew each other, but I've become more of a mind to focus on the possibility that it might have been someone that he knew, or business associate. Because my fear is that by dwelling on the Andrew Cunanan angle without there being a definitive clue, other than, 'Yeah, they probably knew each other,' is that we might lose track of a guy that might still be out there, that needs to be caught. But they traveled in the same circles, there seems to be—according to his own family and people that are close to him—someone in his life that sounds a lot like Cunanan, and lived in a house right where Cunanan is said to have lived. So it's possible." [Cunanan would commit suicide on July 23, 1997, after he murdered fashion designer Gianni Versace a few days earlier.]

With a cult following developed around Loren and his comics over the years [*Rock 'N' Roll* Comics would continue on after his death], Davidov began assembling the aforementioned documentary. Originally released in 2005, *The Story of Rock 'N' Roll Comics* finally made its debut on DVD on April 24th via Wild Eye, who in addition to the full documentary, have compiled a great deal of bonus features, extended interviews, TV news clips, commercials, trailers and a Revolution Comics/ *Rock 'N' Roll* Comics cover art gallery. Additionally, liner notes are included from both rock critic Rob O'Connor and Sanford, the latter of which was very pleased with how the documentary turned out. "I always thought this was an interesting story that people should know. The reason I'm so excited about the film is that someone out there may be able to finally finish the story for us. Give us the ending—tell us who killed Todd Loren."

Looking back, Davidov wonders what Loren would have been up to today. "Had he lived, I believe he would have gone on to do very interesting things, and I think he would be remembered as one of the first to do it on that scale—to do a real biography of real people in comic book form. And put the two together—being a reporter and publishing it in comic book form—that hadn't had been done before. Comic books were about fictional heroes and characters. I'm sure it had been done before, but not on that scale. And not consistently by one publisher. From what I understand, he had aspirations to do many things—he was a good businessperson and had a lot of ideas. He would have ended up maybe working in the music industry. He would be remembered in general as a controversial figure, but who knows—I believe he was capable of becoming an important figure had he not been killed."

Lastly, Loren's former co-worker and friend Sanford offers these parting words. "I would like Todd to be remembered the way that he is portrayed in the film—a polarizing figure who earned the ire of many, but also, gave many their starts in this great business. I don't think he'd mind that at all." And as evidenced by the long-awaited release of *The Story of Rock 'N' Roll* Comics on DVD, Loren's contributions to rock n' roll, comics, and First Amendment rights continue to reverberate to this day.

Greg Prato is a writer whose work has appeared in* Rolling Stone, *and is the author of such books as* The Eric Carr Story *and* MTV Ruled the World. *For more info about his books, visit www.lulu.com/spotlight/gregprato

Stripping, Tripping, and Grave Digging: The Bizarre Film Career of Francoise Pascal

By Adrian Smith

Francoise Pascal may not be a familiar name to movie fans, but one look at her credits reveals that from the late 1960s to the 1980s, she worked with some big names, and has been naked or dead, sometimes both, in a host of cult favorites and guilty pleasures.

Francoise moved from the Indian Ocean paradise of Mauritius to the UK when she was just twelve. As her name suggests, her native language was French, but she soon picked up English and also became fluent in Italian, German, and Spanish. It was her dream to be an actress ever since she first saw Romy Schneider play the Empress of Austria in *Sissi* (1955). "I just wanted to be an actress. I never thought my dream would come true when I came to England. I didn't do anything. I was just very pretty! I had a great body and I was very attractive and I used it." She began as a dancer on the hit television show *Top of the Pops*, which lead to her agent putting her forward for a part in cult director Norman J. Warren's *Loving Feeling* in 1968. At that time Warren was riding high following the massive commercial success of his debut sexploitation feature *Her Private Hell* (1967), and was still several years away from his horror masterpiece *Satan's Slave* (1976). *Loving Feeling* was another sexploitation film, and Francoise was warned at her audition that she would be required to 'do' nudity. "I was very young when I did *Loving Feeling*. I was seventeen, but I lied and said I was eighteen! I wore a miniskirt to the audition, which I think helped get me the part! My mum had to sign my contract. We hid from her that I was going to be nude. She never did find out! I remember doing the nude scene. Bachoo Sen, the producer, took me to the pub and gave me three brandies because I was nervous. I got up and said, 'I'm ready now' He said, 'I'm sure you are!'"

Francoise in Jean Rollin's *The Iron Rose* (1973).

Although very nervous about her first acting role, the experience went well, and the film was another huge success for Warren. This probably says more about the lack of availability of sexually explicit material in cinemas in the late 1960s than it does about the quality of the movie. When Francoise attended the premiere, "in a weird little theatre in Leicester Square," she was confronted with the reality of exactly why all these men in the audience were wearing overcoats. "I was wearing a red little outfit. A one-piece, very very short pants, with a zip in front, for the photographers. As we passed inside I saw a man with his hand moving very fast under his raincoat! I couldn't stop laughing!" Thankfully this grim experience did not put her off the movie business there and then.

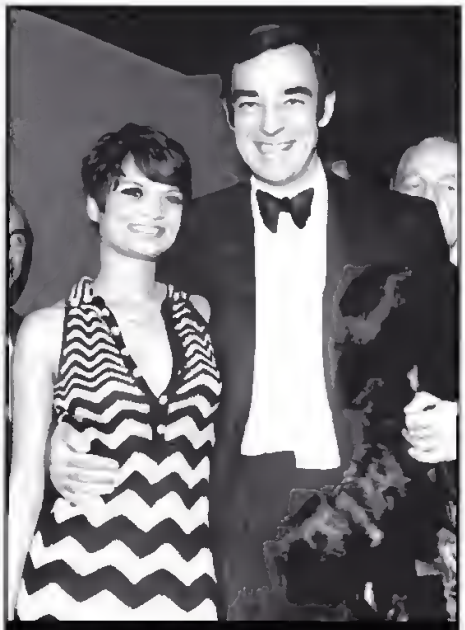
It was shortly after this that she met Richard Johnson, "a very good actor, but a very bad human being," who was by then a major star following *The Haunting* (1963) and the Bulldog Drummond movies, famously turning down the role of James Bond because he was "too perfect for the part." They embarked on a difficult relationship that lasted until 1980, and they have one child together. Francoise reports that Richard encouraged her to do films that she didn't want to do, in the belief that it would be good for her career, or as favors for his friends. One such film was the Pete Walker cheapie *School for Sex* (1969), a poor quality comedy with gratuitous nudity. "I didn't like Pete Walker. I didn't like the film, I didn't like anything to do with the film. When I got on the set, I had to take my clothes off. I hated it. I hated every moment of that film. Pete Walker treated women like shit." In order to sell the film abroad, where censorship was far more relaxed than in the UK, two versions were made. Walker would have the girls shoot a scene first in their underwear, and then repeat the scene totally naked. "You made more money out of selling nudity. I hated it. I hated every moment. I never liked taking my clothes off. I couldn't stand it. It felt so demeaning." Pete Walker, like Norman J. Warren, went on to become a great independent horror director, with films like *The Flesh and Blood Show* (1972) and *Frightmare* (1974) bothering the censors during the 1970s.

Despite the obvious dislike for doing nudity, Francoise was persuaded to disrobe on a couple of occasions for men's magazines. "It brought me money. Money to pay bills and rent!" One memorable photo shoot for *Penthouse* took her to Israel. "Of all the nudity I've ever done, *Penthouse* was the most wonderful experience ever. You weren't allowed to show pubic hair in those days, and I loved it because the photographer was the most influential photographer in Israel. He took the most beautiful photos of me. He captured an amount of vulnerability that no other photographer has seen in me. It was fun to pose with the Israeli soldiers. They wanted to be in the pictures. They loved it! I took a picture with a tank, and that really looked like a phallic symbol. A subtle one. I liked holding the gun, too!"

Francoise began to find work in more mainstream fare, including two films with Peter Sellers, *There's a Girl in My Soup* (1970) and *Soft Beds, Hard Battles* (1974). She also scored a small role in the UK's longest-running television soap opera *Coronation Street*. However, it was mostly sex comedies and low-budget horror films that offered her the best parts. In 1969, she was asked to appear in *Incense for the Damned* (aka *Bloodsuckers*), which had been shot in Greece with Peter Cushing, Patrick Macnee, and Edward Woodward. Despite such a sterling cast, the film was terrible, and efforts were made to liven it up for a younger audience. "The movie was very boring. They brought us in to try and vamp up the film a bit. They needed us to sex it up! There were drugs on the set, although I didn't know that. Everybody was very stoned. The director (Robert Hartford-Davis) came and said to me, 'Francoise, I would like you to lead the scene, a very important scene in the movie.'" The scene in question turned out to be a drug-fueled orgy, and she was uncredited in the final film. "I am supposed to put two acid tabs on my tongue, and have a hallucination. That was the scene. It was two aspirins! I didn't do drugs in those days. I did in my thirties, but not then." The film was such a bomb it was not actually released for three years, and Hartford-Davis refused to allow his name to be on the credits.

Burke & Hare (1972).

A more successful horror experience came for Francoise when she was required to be suffocated in *Burke and Hare* (1972), another true-life account of Edinburgh's most notorious resurrectionists. With disarming honesty she admits, "I hated that film, because I was very bad in it. I wasn't a very good actress and I was very shy about having to take my clothes off, AGAIN. I didn't want to and felt very uncomfortable doing that. I didn't get any kind of direction from Vernon Sewell, who was an old man at the time, bless his heart. He just left it to you to do exactly what you wanted to do. I was in one scene with Harry Andrews, who played Doctor Knox, when I was on the slab! When I was dead! I loved being a corpse, although it was very cold on that slab. And then they uncovered me, and there were my tits, again!" Francoise may have hated the film but she still has some fond memories of the experience. "I loved working with some of the girls there. We became great friends. And the guys! I adored working with Derren Nesbit and Glynn Edwards, who played Burke and Hare. They were such lovely men. They suffocated their victims, so they suffocated me! It was funny, a critic came out and said, 'Miss Pascal is better dead than alive!' I laughed my head off. I think he was right!"



Francoise and Richard Johnson.

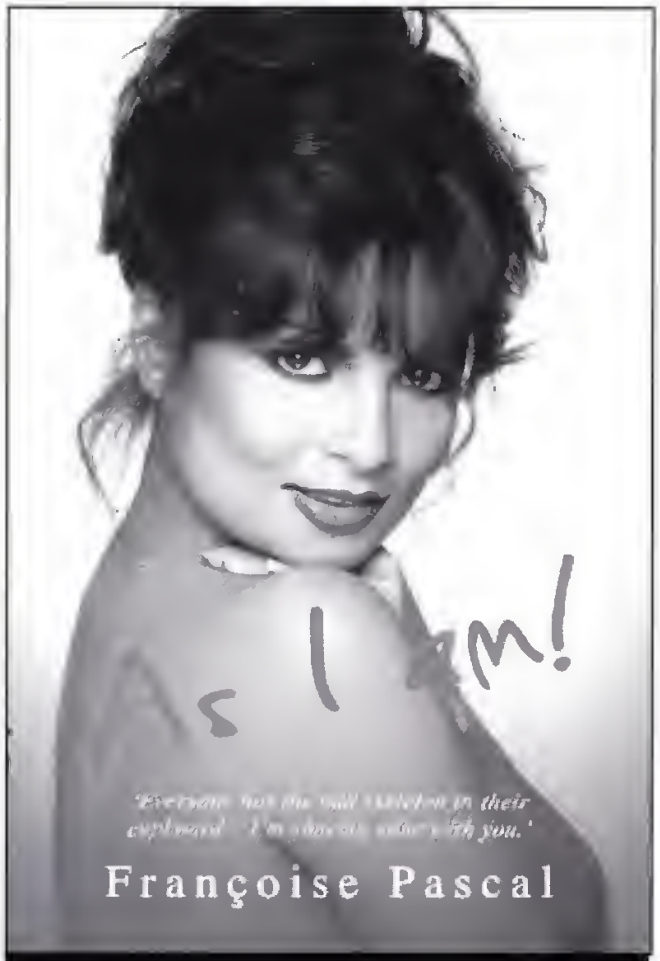
One of Francoise's best-known horror films from this period is Jean Rollin's atmospheric chiller *The Iron Rose*, shot in a freezing French cemetery in 1973. Following the success of his three erotically-charged vampire films *The Rape of the Vampire* (1968), *The Nude Vampire* (1970), and *Le Frisson des Vempires* (*The Shiver of the Vampires*, 1971), Rollin wanted to make something more personal. "He took a lot of chances on that film. Every penny he had was in that film. He was broke afterwards, totally broke. I loved him for it. He had so much hope for the film. When the critics put it down, he was cut down really badly." At the premiere at the 2nd Convention of Cinema Fantastique in Paris, *The Iron Rose* was booed by the audience. He was unable to raise finance for another film for two years.

As the recent Blu-ray release by Redemption Films reveals, the film is a masterpiece. It follows a young couple, Francoise and Hugues Quester, credited simply as The Girl and The Boy, as they walk through a graveyard late at night. Slowly it becomes apparent that they are unable to leave. Like so many of Rollin's films, the visual extravagance and surrealist narrative overwhelm any semblance of a straightforward plot. The audience is not asked to question the logic but to go along with the dream-like construction of the film. This could explain the harsh reception *The Iron Rose* received from critics and an audience who had perhaps hoped to see more lesbian vampires and servant girls in diaphanous gowns. For Francoise, it was a role of a lifetime, and she is forever grateful despite the unusual nature of the shoot. "We shot for about a month, and it was all a night shoot in a cemetery (the Cimetiere de la Madeleine, near Amiens), except for a couple of moments during the day. It was one of the most enormous graveyards you have ever seen in your entire life! It is where Jules Verne is buried. Many writers, actors and philosophers are there. I had the most wonderful friend in the cinematographer Jean-Jacques Renon. We drank whiskey all night to keep warm. He kept shouting, 'Jules Verne, Jules Verne, save us, save us!' Jean-Jacques was a fantastic cameraman. I love the fact that every single picture of me was taken with care, with love. It was very cold. Some of the crew used to say that if you stayed up after midnight, the dead would come out, just to scare the hell out of me!." Francoise not only acted in the film, she also assisted in setting up some of the most memorable scenes. "In the scene where we make love in a hole full of bones, that was actually a real grave which we dug up. I even assisted in moving the coffin. The body was brown, so brown! We dug up a real body! Can you believe it! The hole we were in was full of real bones. The film is very atmospheric because it was so real."

Although Francoise enjoyed the opportunity to star in a movie, Hugues Quester refused for his name to be in the credits, hence he is listed as Pierre Dupont. The film also had the misfortune to open in Paris at the same time as *Last Tango in Paris*, a film so controversial that it took all attention away from everything else. "Jean was very badly hurt by everything. He was particularly hurt by Hugues Quester. They didn't get along at all during the filming. He considered himself a classical actor. He did it because he thought it was going to be a wonderful film. That hurt Jean, and the critics hurt Jean, he got hurt by his fans, a lot of people. I wish he was alive today to see how much of a cult movie it is. Before he died, I had a conversation with him, and I asked, 'Do you know it has become a cult film all around the world?' And he didn't know! I was glad I could tell him. I told him about Jeremy Richey's blog (requiemforjeanrollin.blogspot.com) and he was so pleased." Despite their great relationship, Francoise never worked with Rollin again, due to her increasing demand on UK television, which culminated in a starring role in *Mind Your Languege*. This was an incredibly popular sitcom set in a language school, which remains a favorite to this day. "That was a role that I created for myself and made my own. I became stronger and stronger in that part, and it's the role that most people remember me for. Everybody knows my name, they don't call me by my character's name, Danielle, which is great."

Francoise as Martine in *Go Girl* (1972).

British cinema of the 1970s was suffering financially, and due to the success of sex comedies like the *Confessions of . . .* films, everybody started making them. The films were able to attract high-caliber actors, many of whom were struggling to find work in more quality productions. In 1975 Francoise found herself appearing in the unsurprisingly awful *Keep It Up Downstairs*, where, predictably, she played Mimi, the saucy French maid. "It was such bollocks! But fun to make. I loved being with Diana Dors and Willie Rushton. The funniest thing is I found myself pregnant, I didn't know I was. My corset wouldn't tie up. The costume was very uncomfortable. I remember saying to the costume lady, 'I feel really uncomfortable, and a bit sick too!'" The film mainly consisted of upper-class toffs spanking the maids, and occasionally each other. Tired of nudity, Francoise took the opportunity to befriend co-star Mary Millington, who had made a name for herself in hardcore pornography. "It was lovely to meet Mary. She was a small little girl. So sweet. We had this scene. I hate doing nude scenes, and I asked her, 'Do you really like doing this?' She looked and said, 'Do you know what Francoise? I really think that if you have the body, what's wrong with it? I love sex!' So she actually doubled for my bottom in the film! She didn't have to think about it, she wasn't shy about it." Mary Millington went on to star in several sex comedies, as well as appearing in dozens of pornographic magazines and even running her own sex shop. She committed suicide in 1979, aged just thirty-three.



Francoise's 2012 autobiography *As I Am*.

Francoise Pascal last appeared in a movie in the mid-1980s, co-starring with Mickey Rooney in *Lightning, The White Stallion* (1986), and has spent the past twenty years involved in charity work. She recently organized a major event to commemorate the life of her *Mind Your Language* co-star Barry Evans, who died in mysterious circumstances in 1997. She is an active presence on Facebook and Twitter, and has plans to return to the world of filmmaking, although the details are being kept a secret. "I will be doing a film soon, which is a sort of Ealing comedy. I can't say who is in it as it hasn't started yet, but they will be very familiar faces." She has also just completed her autobiography *As I Am*, in which her relationship troubles with Richard Johnson are all laid bare. It's pretty raw stuff. "I've been very busy with my book. It's exciting but very scary. It's exciting to know that your name is on a book, to know that you're being published!"

Francoise has a charm and honesty which is refreshing in an industry known for egos and fakers. Like many before her, she is a survivor.

SCREEM

FRIGHT FLICK PIC

UP FROM . . . THE BATHTUB???

If there's no lagoon around for miles, some monsters just gotta get creative at times! Although this scene may look like it's not a laughing matter, the film this creature is featured in is a horror spoof comedy. If you think you know what movie this fish freak appears in, you will be one of five lucky *Screem* readers to win a DVD for the correct answer!

Here's your clue:

Jason Vorhees rests on this day.

Our mystery pic for *Screem* #23 was from *JAWS*. The grand prize winner who guessed the correct film, as well as the actor and character name of the poor decapitated soul (Ben Gardner, played by Craig Kingbury), is David Klink. David will take home a box of DVDs, *Screem* back issues, T-shirts, books and other goodies! Our runners up who won a DVD are: Steve Heller, Russell Pennington, and Steve Webb. Congrats!!

Send your answer on a postcard to:

SCREEM FRIGHT FLICK PIC
41 MAYER ST.
WILKES BARRE, PA 18702

WHO LET THE CATS OUT?

JEANNE COOPER REVEALS THE SECRETS OF

THE *BLACK ZOO!*

BY TOM WEAVER

Try and name some Hollywood horror movies where the beestly menaces at the core of the story were real—and actually ON the movie's soundstages—and so dangerous that it was necessary to keep the leading lady locked in her dressing room!

The list would be a short one, in fact, perheps just one title: Black Zoo, *a 1963 Herman Cohen production about the med proprietor of a private zoo (Michael Gough in his one Hollywood film) unleashing his deadliest animals on every unfortunate who incurs his displeasure. "Elaborately violent and gory" (*Variety*), the Allied Artists releese co-starred actress Jeanne Cooper—better known today for her nearly 40 years at the head of the cast of the daytime drama* The Young and the Restless. *To celebrate Warner Archives' racent DVD releese of* Black Zoo *(its first time ever on home video), Ms. Cooper describes for* Screem *her encounters with lions and tigers and chimps. Oh my!*

SCREEM: Do you recall how you landed your starring role in *Black Zoo?*

JEANNE COOPER: I was sent out to meet one or two of the people who'd be making this movie. The producer was Herman Cohen, and the director, Bob Gordon, was someone I knew from some other stuff. As far as they were concerned, I was perfect for the part. The only question was, "Would you be frightened of the animals?" I said, "As long as they're in their cages and I'm in mine, I'll be just fine!" Little did I know that there'd be a chimp that would fall madly in love with me. And if it was "that time of the month" for me, they'd have to lock me in my dressing room, because the chimp would [laughs] . . . the chimp would want to breed and get a start on making this a Planet of the Apes! It was just a delicious little, crazy thing, the fact that he took a liking to me. After every occasion when I had ANYthing to do with the chimp, they would take him away immediately because he would have fits, wanting to come to my dressing room and go home with me and everything else! Half of my time on *Black Zoo* was spent locked up in my dressing room because the chimp was after me or because a lion was loose or whatEVER. The trainer would say, "It's not dangerous, we're just taking precautions. Take Jeanne to her dressing room and lock her in!" I thought, "Oh my God, is this picture jinxed, or WHAT?" But I must say, I did have a ball doing it because of the animals. It was an experience. Actually, I was more afraid of Michael Gough than I was of the lion and the chimp [laughs]. He was so SPOOKY, and of course he played my husband who was going to try to kill me eventually. It was just so spooky, it was so real, it was amazing.

So no hesitation, despite the kind of picture it was?

Horror movies make money. I was shocked when I first realized how many people LOVE horror movies. Oh my God! Horror movies were the kind of thing that I, as an ordinary actress, would always sorta frown upon. But somehow it didn't seem so bad because I was surrounded with animals.

As a kid growing up, did you see horror movies?

Guess what I saw? My first movie [the first one she ever saw] was *Frankenstein* (1931). It was so hysterical. I was five, and I went with my siblings and a few cousins. Our parents took us to the theater and sat us in our seats and said, "We'll be back. Don't move from your seats." When I got home, the first question my grandmother asked was, "Was it in SOUND?" It was around 1931, when sound was still kind of a new thing.

Did *Frankenstein* scare you?

Not at all! But guess what? I never forgot this, it's as vivid as though it happened yesterday . . . absolutely hysterical. After I went home, my mother asked me to get something from the back porch, and I went, and I saw this shadow, and I SCREAMED at the top of my lungs! And it was MY OWN shadow. Now, I was never ever frightened of the dark, ever ever ever. I could have walked a mile by myself in the dark at three years of age and not flinched at any noise or what have you. But THAT night, my shadow made me scream. My mother said, "Jeanne . . . Sweetheart . . . that's your shadow!" THAT is when I started doubting the dark [laughs]. And this was after I WASN'T frightened of *Frankenstein*. At the theater, everybody was screaming, the kids, my sister, my brother [Cooper imitates their screaming], and I was sitting there thinking, "What are they so frightened of? THIS funny looking thing [the Monster]?" I was never ever frightened of ANYthing. *Frankenstein* didn't bother me but a shadow DID. I remember my mother subsequently saying to my father, "I told you that I did not want them going to that movie!" And as a kid, I was never allowed to see ANYthing scary from that point on.

***Black Zoo* was shot at Allied Artists, yes?**

Yeah, right. The zoo was an interior set; I bet they wanted everything inside in order to help maintain control of the animals. Whenever the cats were going to be used in a scene, trainers and handlers were all over the place. On one occasion, someone noticed that one of the cats wasn't in its cage, and they started looking for it. And back into her locked dressing room went Jeanne [laughs]! They finally spotted it, asleep under one of the wagons. I remember a guy calling out, "Found her! Found her! She's here." SOUND asleep! I called out, "Can I come out now?" and I could hear somebody say, "Oh, yeah, somebody let Jeanne out of her dressing room!" [Laughs] Oh God!

Michael Gough had approximately a 70-year career but this was his only Hollywood movie.

I've heard that he was a magnificent Shakespearean actor. Most English actors, the long-lasting ones anyway, all had Shakespearean careers. Even the extras in their movies have been Shakespearean-trained! Theater is taken very seriously over there. Here [Hollywood], you go stand on the corner near Sinclair Paints and somebody'll pick you up and put you in a show [laughs]! That's what illegals do when they want to pick up a day's work, they go stand in front of Sinclair Paints and that means they want to paint your house for $150! But, yes, Michael Gough was just "champion champion" people, and he had fun on the picture also.

You say the chimp loved you. Did you love the chimp?

Y'know what? Yes I did. He was so sweet. When they put their arms around you, they're like children. Actually, I became a tremendous animal activist BECAUSE of *Black Zoo*; I was very involved with that, up until a year ago or so. Like Bob Barker, who has donated millions toward animal protection, I would like to see NO person allowed to have a dog or cat or ANY animal unless it's spayed or neutered. And let's put an end to the puppy mill bullshit. If people could see where these precious little animals [puppy mill puppies] come from! If you could see these animals prior to shipment, muddy and covered with all kinds of yuck, you'd think they came from a pig farm. It'd break your heart. We're trying to stamp all of that out.

Jeanne Cooper and friends appear in the Allied Artists film *Black Zoo.*

When you do your act with the chimps, you wear quite a skimpy outfit.

I know! Listen, I think I looked terrific, and I didn't mind doing it at ALL. The chimps loved it [laughs]!

I'm sure the CREW loved it too!

You bet! "Jeanne! Time to act! Take your clothes off!"

How was Michael Gough with the animals? He's on-camera with uncaged cats quite a bit.

He would make jokes about it, but he didn't seem to have any apprehension about the animals whatsoever. If he did, he never let anyone know it, nor did he show it. I've seen him in two or three English films, nothing of great consequence, although I know he HAS done some fine films, and then he had a bit of a last hurrah playing the butler in some of the recent *Batmen* movies. He had that ominous look, and so consequently you didn't have to direct him or say to him, "Hey, look ominous." He just LOOKED ominous!

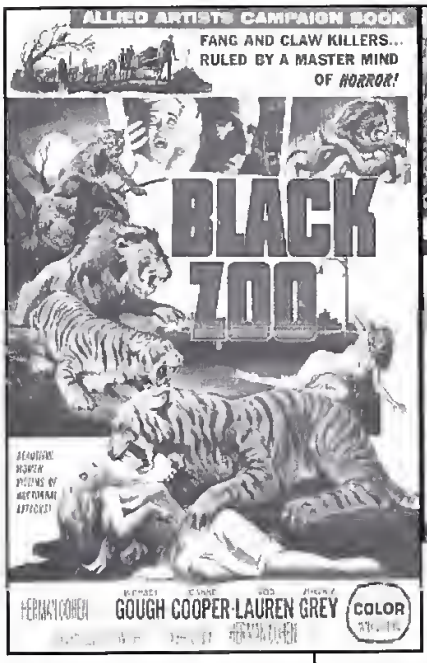
Two or three times in the picture, you have long, loud, back-and-forth arguments with him, and some of them were shot in one take. It's like watching the two of you on a stage.

I love monologues, those are my forte, and I love two-person scenes with back-and-forth dialogue. He had a stage background and I had a stage background, so that's how we did it, rather than doing a "chopped-up" scene—the same scene done five times from five different angles. One-take scenes are just like my show in daytime [*The Young and the Restless*]. It's beautiful to get in there and do the whole scene and, ZINGO!, there it IS, you've got the scene, rather than belabor it. There are actors and actresses that can DO that, but they're few and far between.

Did you know in advance that they wanted to do these long scenes in one take?

What happens is, when the scene is being rehearsed, they [directors, producers, etc.] see what you can do. And then they may say, "Hey . . . we can do this in one take." My very early background, from theater, has put me in a position to make things very simple and very easy for myself, in whatever I'm doing and for whoever I'm working for. When you're doing the low-budget films, and you nail something in one take, it's a timesaver—and time is money. One thing about a small film like *Black Zoo* is that there's such a family feeling about it. There's a spirit about it, because everybody's on the same pege, and it goes over to the audience almost as an intimate picture.

Your director, Robert Gordon, started out as a kid actor. He played Al Jolson's character as a kid in the early scenes of *The Jazz Singer* (1927).



An actor is there to interpret the words and a director is there to make them right and make them fit, and then if everything goes well, then you may have a hit film, small-budget or big-budget, it doesn't matter. Having been an actor, Gordon let the actor contribute their interpretation, and he'd take the best parts of what they were doing. I understand Clint Eastwood works that way. I'd love to work with him. Well, I DID, and did not know it: I was on an episode of *Rawhide* (before he was much of a star). Then he and several other cowboy guys had big careers, humongous careers, after going to Italy and doing their Spaghetti Westerns—Westerns where the baddie is the romantic one because he has more balls than the leading man, the leading man's just pretty. Everybody who's worked with Clint as a director says he comes on the set and talks over a scene with the actors and the scene is shot and he likes it and that's IT and he goes on to the NEXT scene. He lets the actor "happen." And so it was with Gordon on *Black Zoo*: Having been an actor, he let the actor "happen." Lots of times, the actor then will come forth with some things. I'm reminded of a director at the Pasadena Playhouse who, in one of our classes, said, "I don't care WHAT you do in this scene. You can go over the top, do whatever you want . . . and then I can choose what I want. But if you don't give me enough, I won't know if you can do it or not."

In *Black Zoo* you had some old veterans in supporting roles, including Virginia Grey and Elisha Cook Jr.

Virginia Grey and I did a lot of television together. She was GOOD, she was focused. And I had already worked with Elisha Cook in *Plunder Road* in 1957. They were in a class by themselves, the Elisha Cooks and the Peter Lorres of this business. There's one kid on (*The Young and the Restless*), Greg Rikaart, who could fit into that category 'cause he can play a nutcase so beautifully! He's a young kid so when I told him that, of course, he had no idea who Elisha Cook or Peter Lorre were. He does NOW.

It's so different in Hollywood today than it was then. In the old days, there was passion. There's very little passion now, everything is digital and electronic. All you have to do is have a face and if [the producers] like it, they'll edit it so people think you can act (laughs)! Kids come from out of the woodwork and go to an acting teacher and take two lessons and think they're ready to be a movie star, when that's about as much as they know. In the old days, people prepared themselves for the long haul. Like in *Black Zoo*, these actors (Cook, Grey, Jerome Cowan, etc.) had INVESTED in their careers, INVESTED in their training, INVESTED in themselves. In the old days, the studios had as many character actors under contract as they did stars, because they were good at making the stars look like stars. The studio bosses knew that if they wanted to make (say) Lana Turner a star, they had to surround her with people who were going to make her look like one.

Rod Lauren was a singer in real life, and in *Black Zoo* they had him play a mute!

They must have assumed that they could sell tickets to *Black Zoo* based on his popularity. Michael Gough worked with him and was very pleased with him.

Later, when Lauren lived in the Phillippines, his wife was murdered, and everyone was sure he was responsible.

Well, he and Bobby Blake! "Pardon me while I go into this restaurant and get my gun, I wanna show it to ya!" [Laughs]

The last scene in *Black Zoo* takes place in a drenching rainstorm. Is it unpleasant to work under those conditions?

Rainstorms can be such plusses, because they're dynamic in a scene. Of course they're wet and sloppy, but they're amazing in a scene. We've had 'em on *The Young and the Restless* several times and I have LOVED it because it adds such drama to the reality of it. Working in "rain" is fun because you're working with an element. The funniest rain scene I have ever done in my life was years and years ago. Almost everybody who came into the business in the years when I did, did Westerns out the ying-yang, in television AND in film. I was doing an *Adventures of Kit Carson* with Bill Williams, a very fine, fine actor. It got to the point where we HAD to wrap it up and so we were shooting night for day. We were already shooting at night when it was supposed to be day, and then it began to rain when it was supposed to be sunshine! I said, "You guys . . . it's raining." They said, "It's okay, don't worry about it. We'll light it so that the rain can't be seen." Consequently, as I was delivering lines, my hair was getting wetter and wetter; everybody was drenched by the time we finished the scene. We finished it and they accepted it and you saw it on film: My hair was falling down around my ass, and it was supposed to be daytime, it was supposed to match another scene we did at two o'clock that afternoon! But they didn't care!

The thing I didn't like about the *Black Zoo* rain scene is that you can see all the caged animals getting rained on also.

[laughs]: They're more used to it than WE are! They're out there when it starts raining out on the plains, on the Serengeti or whatever you call it. When it starts raining, they don't look for a house or a zoo or a cage! That's part of their life. But WE all run for shelter, like something abnormal is happening!

You wrestle around with Gough at the end, as he's trying to shove you into a lion's cage. You put up such a struggle, it looks like he's having a hard time holding on to you!

In most "fights" of that type, "struggling" scenes, you are told to really struggle, so that the scene becomes real. Michael, if push came to shove, coulda probably shoved me in the cage [laughs]. You look forward to scenes like that because they're "different."

If a friend said to you, "I want to watch one of your movies. Which one should I watch?" what would you tell them?

Let No Man Write My Epitaph (1960). It's a good film, there's no two ways about it. That's where I became very good friends with Ella Fitzgerald, and we were friends up until her death. Still ARE, in spirit. What a lady. WHAT a lady! She was going to play the drug addict and one of her people came to me and said, "Miss Fitzgerald would like to know if she could come over and ask you a few things." I said, "[Cooper makes sputtering noises] PLEASE! Of COURSE I'll talk with her!" She came over, and I told her, "I am so totally blown away by just being in your presence." I even said, "You and I had a conversation many years ago. I was a young student at the Pasadena Playhouse and you were playing at some jazz hall in L.A.," and I began to describe the conversation to her—and she remembered the conversation that we'd had! She said, "My God, that was YOU?"

Anyway, she said, "I have to ask you something important. How would you play this drug addict if you were me?" This was a tremendous compliment, Ella Fitzgerald asking ME. I said, "Ella, if I were you, I would play her just like Ella Fitzgerald would play a drug addict!" [Laughs] And she laughed, and we became friends from that point on. So, as you see, I've been the recipient of a lot of kindnesses, from chimpanzees, lions, Michael Gough . . . and Ella Fitzgerald [laughs]!

PROMETHEUS HAS LANDED

Screem talks *Prometheus* with screenwriter Jon Spaihts

By James J. Gormley

The official synopsis preceding 20th Century Fox's hotly anticipated June 8, 2012 release of Sir Ridley Scott's Prometheus, *the first prequal to 1979's* Alien *blockbuster, reads like this:*

> *"Visionary filmmaker Ridley Scott returns to the genre he helped define, creating an original science fiction epic set in the most dangerous corners of the universe. The film takes a team of scientists and explorers on a thrilling journey that will test their physical and mental limits and strand them on a distant world, where they will discover the answers to our most profound questions and to life's ultimate mystery."*

Just as with the original Alien, *which was arguably set in the year 2122, it has always been exceedingly difficult to squarely classify the movies as action, suspense, sci-fi, or horror. A legitimate argument can be made that, given the mixed sense of dread and wonder that comes through via the multiple prerelease teaser promos and full-length trailers (in addition to posted interviews with Scott and cast members),* Prometheus *can be categorized as belonging to all of these genres and yet not solely to any one.*

Scott and one of the two screenwriters, Damon Lindelof, made an appearance at WonderCon 2012 in Anaheim, CA, on March 17th, followed by a press Q&A with actor Michael Fassbender, who plays the "David" android in the upcoming genre-busting fifth Alien *franchise film (seventh if we include the two* Alien vs. Predator *offshoots). When asked at WonderCon as to what genre (or mix of genres)* Prometheus *fits into, Scott said, "The bottom line is just to make a good movie. Just make a f---ing good movie."*

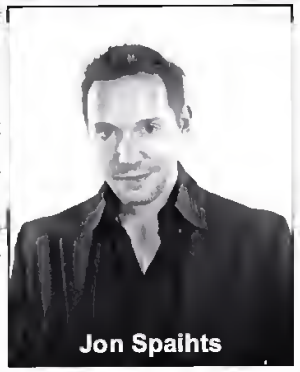
There's no doubt, even at this moment before the Alien *saga's latest entry (said to be set in the year 2085), that viewers the world over will be treated to a powerful, perhaps epic, film undoubtedly worthy of the franchise's best legacy.*

Screem magazine *sat down with the screenwriter who conceived the* Prometheus *story, Jon Spaihts. He shares with all of us his candid and provocative insights into this avidly awaited classic-to-be.*

Ridley Scott directs Noomi Rapace on the set of *Prometheus*. Photo by Kerry Brown.

***Screem*: I read that not only are you the first of the two screenwriters on *Prometheus* but that you also pitched the script to Fox originally.**

Jon Spaihts: It's true. I went to a meeting at Ridley Scott's company, Scott Free [Productions], in what was probably late 2009. They were impressed by a couple of scripts I had written and wanted to see if they might find something to work with me on. They pitched me a number of things that they had in their hopper—books they had the rights to, films they were remaking—the usual general meeting. It was only late in the meeting that the head of the company, Michael Costigan, to whom I was speaking, said they had been looking for a long time to make another movie set in the *Alien* universe, but that nobody had been able to crack the story. Everyone felt that the franchise had played itself out going forward, so the only way to go was backward in time, but nobody knew quite how to do it. And it was kind of a thunderbolt for me, that question, because I had never thought about *how* I would go about telling another story in that universe, never pondered the question, but found when I was asked that I had a lot of ideas.



Jon Spaihts

Particularly, the great unsolved mystery of the first *Alien* film (1979)—we glimpse signs and portents of another whole civilization. We see a dead giant in a colossal space station that has obviously not been built by the monster in the film. [It's] tantalizing and yet terribly difficult to tell a whole story about a completely alien civilization, so somehow that alien story had to be connected to us. And that's when I found I had ideas and I just started riffing in a room and I riffed for 45 minutes. At the end of it all, Costigan looked at me and asked me if I would write that down for Ridley, who was then in the editing room working on *Robin Hood* [2010].

Your reps, if you're a writer, your reps will always tell you not to write the story down and leave it behind, because people can steal your ideas and steal your work, but this was Ridley Scott, so I promptly wrote it down and left it behind. And after that things took off almost immediately. In something like ten days, I was sitting in a conference room with Ridley and the co-chairs of 20th Century Fox, and Ridley was no longer talking about merely producing the film but about directing it himself.

How were the screenwriting roles divided up between you and Damon Lindelof? Broadly?

Sequentially. I wrote five drafts of the movie, over many months, working very closely with Ridley. I would go off and write my draft and sit in the room with Ridley Scott and Michael Costigan and Michael Ellenberg, his two lieutenants at the time, and Ridley would pull out his sketch pad and draw. We'd index card the whole story on the bulletin board in the room and pace around. By the time we were done, there was a little art department running on it, and Arthur Max, the production designer, was hard at work. I would literally sketch scenes out in a room that evening, come in the next morning, and there would be a four-foot-wide painting on the wall of the scene I had described the previous day.

In late 2010, when we got to the place where the studio was basically committed to make the film, and really excited about what we'd come up with, that's when the thing that my agent had been warning me about from day one actually happened. I was replaced with a name writer, which, as an unproduced writer at that time, I pretty much knew was coming.

I have read that you've been commissioned by Scott Free Productions to pen the sequel to this prequel. Are you able to confirm this?

They have talked to me about subsequent films. In fact, subsequent films were part of our creative discussion from the very beginning. But I'm not under contract to write them and, to the best of my knowledge, nobody is yet.

Origin and identity are powerful threads running through the *Alien* franchise: Where do the aliens come from? Is Ash a human or an android? Why are these themes so critical to the filmatic storytelling for *Alien*, generally, and for *Prometheus* specifically?

I think no film in this universe has engaged the questions of origins and beginnings and what the nature of humanity truly is more deeply than *Prometheus*. I think those themes loomed into existence, in part, because of the duality of predator and prey in Ridley's original film. The beast in *Alien* is an eerily perfect killer of human beings. Armored and hard where we are soft and naked. Blasphemous in the mechanisms by which it kills. It rapes, it impregnates. It does hideous things. It's an abomination, it seems, in the face of all that is holy, and the perfect protagonist to fight that antagonist is Ripley, a strong but beautiful woman, ultimately half naked, protected by thin cloth against this armored monster. It is in that way the ultimate story of the human being overcoming and the human essence overcoming. And the story of a human being, very far from her natural home, in a deeply alien place and in the cold and inhospitable world, the space where no one can hear you scream.

A trippy image from Ridley Scott's *Prometheus*.

Logan Marshall-Green, left, Noomi Rapace and Michael Fassbender explore a planet in the darkest corners of the universe. Photo by Kerry Brown.

Noomi Rapace (left) and Katie Dickie (with Michael Fassbender in the background) explore the Ampule room. Photo courtesy of Twentieth Century Fox.

The Space Jockey from *Prometheus*.

A monolithic figure towers over the explorers of a distant planet. Photo by Kerry Brown.

Well, we touched on androids. And so are there inhumane or mechanistic aspects to humans and conversely humane aspects to androids that help us to understand each other? Or is it the identity question again, what does it mean to be human versus an android being, since both are sentient. So in this regard will we be surprised by what Michael Fassbender's android character in *Prometheus* brings to the table?

I think the fascination with automatons, with artificial life, goes all the way back to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and further back to the legends of The Golem, and honestly fairy tales about artificial people, that go back as long as people have told stories. Even genies in bottles, I think, fall into this class. And the thing we seem to expect from the automaton, from the android, is a perspective; they are somehow above the fray—they don't have sex, they don't grow old, they don't have mothers, they don't fall in love, or rarely fall in love. So perhaps they have a more removed philosophical view of the human condition in which they halfway participate, looking like us and seeming like us, but in which they can't enter into. We always have imagined the automaton's lot to be a little schizophrenic. They feel superior to us because they don't age and they're not subject to our animal passions, and yet they are jealous of us because they are not real in a way that we are real. They're simultaneously smug and ashamed about their own natures. They simultaneously exalt in their inhuman state and wish they could be fully human. We've seen that story told a thousand times. I think it resonates very deeply in all of us.

***The Darkest Hour* (2011) also involved malevolent aliens. Does the concept of evil aliens or creatures with an alien set of values and morals connect most with you as a writer of futuristic fiction? Or is it that in both of these movies, this and *Prometheus*, it was necessary for the story and the plot for them to be "evil"?**

I would say in both those stories, and in most alien invasion stories, the aliens fall somewhat short of evil. They are merely in opposition to all that is human. That's the scary thing about alien stories as opposed to stories of the supernatural or stories about demons or monsters. Aliens are not devils; they're just other civilized beings that owe us nothing and whose interests may compete with ours. And by virtue of the fact that they showed up in spaceships, they have superior technology, they are ahead of us. The great story of the human animal on earth has been winning all competitions with every other life form; we are the masters of the birds of the air and the beasts of the field. So it makes sense that one of our ultimate nightmares should be entering into a competition with another life form that we can't win.

Without giving away key story elements, is it fair to say that Erich von Däniken's 1973 U.S. release of *Chariots of the Gods* was a strong influence to you in this film's gestalt? And if so can you expand?

I can say that the discerning viewer might detect a whiff of von Däniken about *Prometheus*. I can't say more than that.

Fair enough. In pre-CGI *Alien* postproduction, all effects were optical. Does *Prometheus* make wide use of CGI compared to other recent sci-fi films? Also, can you tell us why the new film is in 3-D? What does that accomplish for you and Ridley in terms of what cinema-going experience you collectively want this movie to provide?

There is inevitably plenty of CG in *Prometheus*. It's impossible to make a film of this scope, and in these settings in modern day, without it. But the great beauty of watching Ridley make the movie is that, in fact, he does more in camera than I would say virtually any other director working in science fiction today. Much of the time—he shot in *cathedral-sized* sets that you stood in and believed while you were there—the characters rode in vehicles that really drove around and wore suits that really functioned. Frequently, the *only* lighting on the actors is the passive light being thrown by elements of the set. Truly ambient lighting. Add a little vapor to the air, you've got a kind of realism, in camera, that very few directors bother to achieve any more, and I think that pays dividends in every frame of the film.

And as for 3-D, what 3-D gives you, if you do it right, is immersion. A placement of yourself in a space and a visceral sense of your own scale, and in this case very often of your own tininess in the colossal and alien landscape that he places you in. There's good 3-D and bad 3-D as well, I should say, a whole spectrum. *Prometheus* will set the gold standard for 3-D. It is perfect.

The publicity campaign on this movie seems to have more depth and continuity and planning behind it than any campaign since *Star Wars* in 1977. Were you involved in the creation of this backstory and on the campaign? And if so, or even if not, what do you think about it so far?

I was engaged in preliminary conversations about this kind of material when I was still on deck, but it's really all stuff that was created between Ridley and Damon. And I adore it. I think it's clever, I think it's whimsical and bold and I'm enjoying every minute of it.

H.R. Giger was said to have worked on *Prometheus*, especially with the new redesign and larger xenomorphs. Giger was said to not have been pleased with the post-*Alien*-franchise aliens. It must be great to have him back on board. Can you confirm or expand on any of this?

I know that Ridley did meet and work with him. I can't say very much about how.

Rumor has it that you have filmed in such far-flung locations as the Valley of the Moon in Jordan, Iceland, Pinewood Studios, and Scotland's Isle of Skye. Without giving away any spoilers, can you speak generally about what these sorts of topographies were able to help you achieve? If they were used of course.

All of those locations were at least scouted if not used; I know most of them were used. I think I can only say that that diversity of landscapes was used to convey the vast sweep of events included in the story *Prometheus* will tell.

Charlize Theron's character Meredith Vickers seems to have aspects of the corporate person that we originally saw in Paul Reiser's character in *Aliens* [1986]. Corporate amorality and greed seem to be important threads to the whole franchise. Do these reminders or cautionaries stem more from your own social concerns or are they really just staying true to what Dan O'Bannon envisioned in the original *Alien*.

I think the alien universe has a kind of thematic compass built into it by now. And that the duality between the human and the corporation, between the human and the android, and between the human and the alien, are necessary parts of a story to be told in this universe. And so in that way I think including those themes and elements was really just me . . . obeying the laws of the land.

There's been a lot of press, some saying this will not be a monster movie and will not have the chest-busters in it, but yet we know there will be xenomorphs in it. Would it be fair to say that it is an origins movie that happens to have aliens in it? Or if not, please characterize it the way you feel it is more accurate if you can.

Charlize Theron and Idris Elba on the bridge of the ship Prometheus.
Photo by Kerry Brown.

I think that entire philosophical discussion is one that I should side step. I'll refer the audience to the trailer.

Ridley was quoted as saying a prequel to *Alien* "would be a lot of fun, but the most important thing is to get the story right." Which of the post-*Alien*-canon films do you feel got it right and why, is part one? And part two, although a sequel, I assume *Prometheus* aims to get it right to yours and Ridley's satisfaction, what are the main keys to a prequel or sequel getting it right?

I think there's a broad consensus that after Ridley's original masterpiece the other film in the franchise that is really worthy of some honor is Cameron's film [*Aliens*]. But I really looked to Ridley's original for my inspiration and cultural roots. And in writing any story that takes place in a universe that other stories have already colonized, I think the secret to getting it right is insisting on standing on your own merits. Not to be your father's son but to be your own man. A good story in your own right.

Word is that you are a math whiz who has written several math prep books for The Princeton Review. Is this correct?

I did in fact pay my rent that way in my first few years out of college.

Do you think your math and logical reasoning skills helped in realizing futuristic visions as a screenwriter, specifically with *Prometheus*?

Yes, I studied physics at Princeton for two years before I realized that I didn't have the calculus to keep going and that I wanted to be a writer more than I wanted to be a scientist. But I've never stopped reading the science press, and I think that my real grounding in science makes me a far better writer of science fiction.

A bad science fiction writer thinks that sci-fi means anything goes, but, in fact, I think stories flourish most in science fiction when they are tightly constrained by the laws of reality.

You are a photographer, too, so assuming that that's correct, do your visual and artistic expertise complement that of Ridley's? And if so, how?

It would be cheeky to say that my photographic skills complement Ridley Scott's. But I'm flattered that anyone would even ask the question. Certainly, it means I think rigorously about photography, about angle of view and exposure and depth of field and color. And so that perhaps makes me a more enthusiastic audience to watch Ridley at work because I absolutely appreciate what a mastery he has.

***Alien* reshaped the science fiction genre cinematically and overall; are you excited about the potential for *Prometheus* to revolutionize the genre once again?**

I am. I think *Prometheus* will cast a long shadow, and people will still be watching it and talking about it many years from now.

One-sheet theatrical poster for *Prometheus*.

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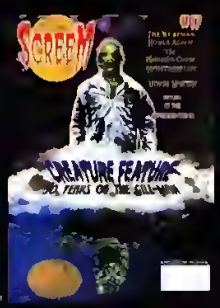

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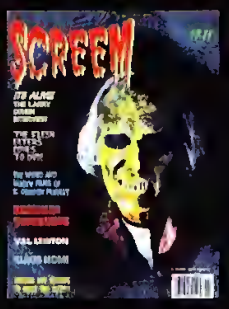

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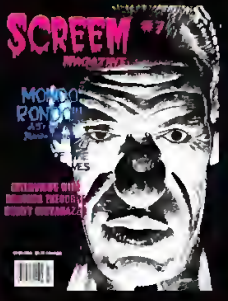

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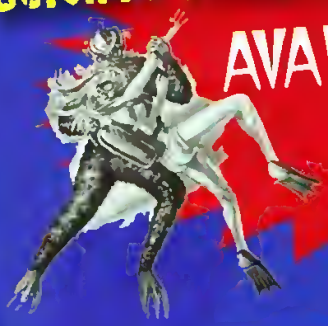

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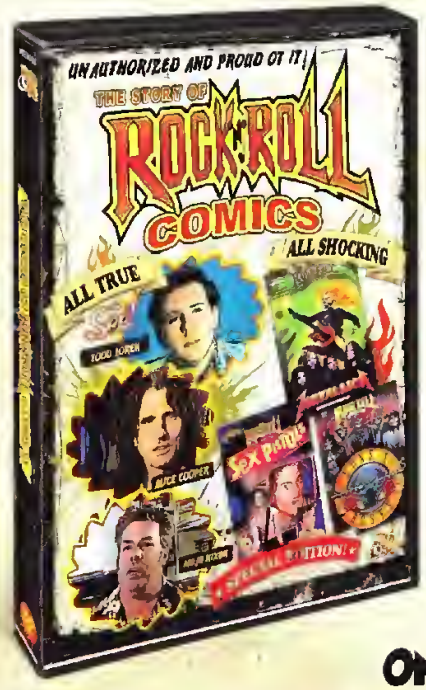

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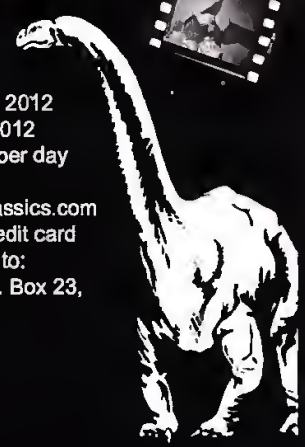

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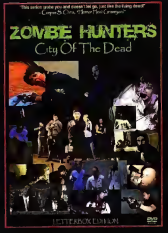

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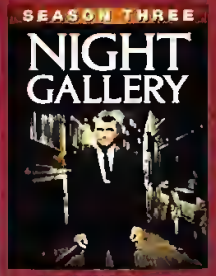

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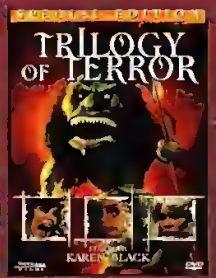

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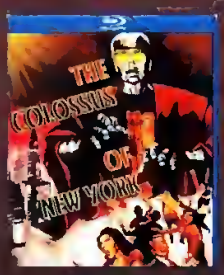

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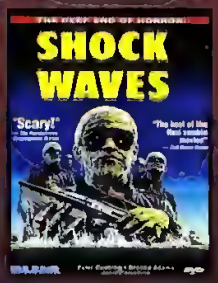

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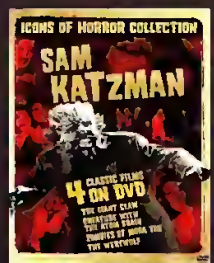

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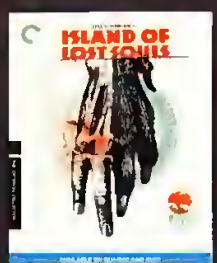

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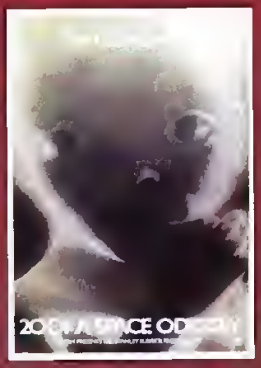

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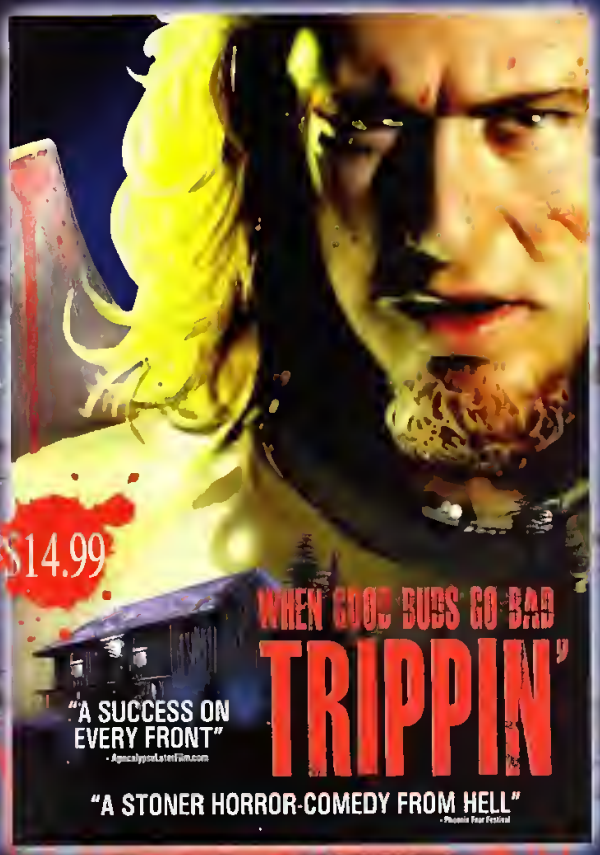

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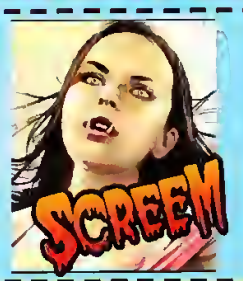

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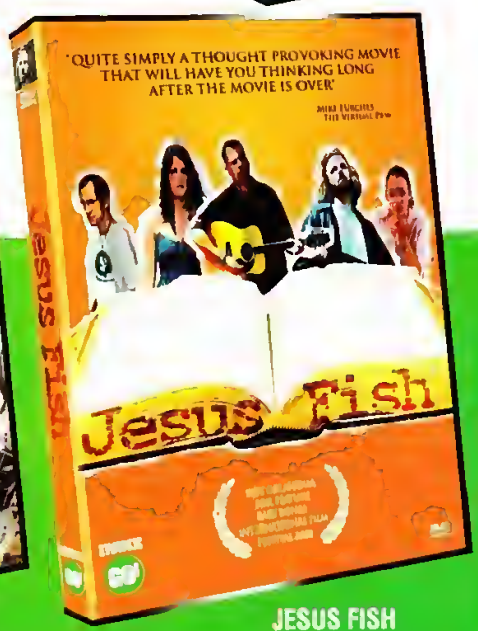

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MR. VERSATILE: RAY MILLAND

ARTICLE BY DAVID A. KRZISNIK

Reginald Alfred John Truscott-Jones. The name immediately brings to mind one of the finest horror and sci-fi actors to ever grace the silver screen. Never heard of old Reginald? You may know him better by his much preferred stage name—Ray Milland. As he aged, this Academy Award-winning actor, from Hollywood's Golden Age, was often maligned by critics and fans alike for appearing in low-budget sci-fi and horror flicks. However, it would be remiss to dismiss this former urbane and suave leading man from the pantheon of actors who have thrilled and chilled audiences over the years. In his later years, Milland certainly accepted roles that could be deemed beneath his stature. But even in somewhat hokey, campy, or just downright bad films, Ray Milland always shined as the consummate film actor, turning in solid performances and bringing an air of dignity to many a "B Schlockfest."

One of Milland's most notable "bad" horror films is the 1972 reptilian-amphibian revenge film, *Frogs*. Frogs. *Today the Pond—Tomorrow the World!* The most interesting fact about these titular characters is that they never actually commit any of the film's "gruesome" murders, unless one counts Ray Milland falling out of his wheelchair and having the frogs hop all over his prostrate body at the film's end. Instead, a host of other repto-amphibians (and the occasional arachnid) do the dirty work. There are worse 70s horror films, to be sure. Writer-satirist Fran Lebowitz once commented, "*Frogs* is the best bad movie I have ever seen in my life."

The film opens promisingly enough; a young "not-yet-cowboyed-up" Sam Elliot snaps pictures from his canoe in an atmospherically creepy swamp. Close-ups of various humidity loving creatures fill the screen, interspersed with shots of mankind's defiling of the environment. As Elliot's character (Pickett Smith) photographs various examples of the besmirching of land and sea through industrial waste and other man-made nastiness, the viewer gets the sneaking suspicion that someone is going to have to pay for spoiling Mother Nature. That someone is none other than Ray Milland as Jason Crockett, a wheelchair bound, grumpy millionaire industrialist and patriarch of the dysfunctional Crockett clan.

After a canoe versus power boat mishap, Smith (Elliot) is rescued by a young Joan Van Ark and her brother, Adam Roarke. A few awkward introductory lines later and Pickett Smith finds himself the guest of the wealthy Jason Crockett, just as his family and servants are preparing for his annual birthday party.

Despite the film's general cheesiness, Milland's portrayal of the overbearing capitalist is right on target. The elder Crockett hosts his birthday party on the Fourth of July *every year* come hell or high water—even despite the deaths of a few key relatives and one of his employees. The audience first meets Jason Crockett as he waits impatiently on the manicured lawn of his elegant southern mansion for his offspring to return with his boat. Milland is the perfect picture of privilege and wealth at its decline: wheelchair bound, impeccably dressed, and an air of disgruntled disdain for almost everything and everyone.

The viewer soon learns that an ever-increasing and incessantly noisy frog population is keeping the entitled Crocketts awake at night. Jason has dutifully dispatched one of his men to take care of the problem with some serious old school P-O-I-S-O-N, but the employee never returns. Pickett Smith is entrusted by Crockett to locate the missing man, for he appears to trust newcomer Smith over his own brood. Smith discovers the body of the employee (killed by a giant snake). Crockett insists they keep the death "mum" until after his party, adamantly refusing to let anyone fetch the body until his celebration is over. Soon enough the reptiles and amphibians of "Crockett Island" exact their revenge for all the years of debasement.

Many critics assume that Milland was desperate for roles and the cash they provided when he accepted projects like *Frogs*. When once asked why he often chose less than stellar film projects during his golden years, Milland quipped, "Money, my boy, money!" While this might be true on some level—Hollywood has a well-documented history of often disregarding its former leading men and women—one must examine Milland's performances in these later pictures to truly formulate an opinion.

In *Frogs*, Milland turns in e solid, highly believable and well-rounded performance. He even hides that wonderfully clipped Welsh accent behind the thin veneer of a gentlemanly southern dialect. With sparse dialogue (the script's shortcoming) Milland deftly, and often quite overtly, telegraphs to the audience Crockett's individual relationships with each of his family members. He openly despises his son Clint (Roarke) for his drunkenness, favors his daughter Karen (Van Ark, the most stable of the clan), and takes a liking to outsider Pickett Smith, despite he and Smith being polar opposites on environmental issues.

Milland reveals Crockett's simmering scorn for his own physical impotence, his family, and especially his inability to control the run-away ecology of his island. When he can control things, however, he does. Jason Crockett is quite above being disgusted or frightened by the amphibian-reptile onslaught. Without batting an eye, Jason calmly shoots a snake who has the audacity to perch itself on one of Crockett's chandeliers.

Ray Milland excels at portraying this bitter, moneyed-class entrepreneur—one who has contributed greatly to the ecological havoc that now threatens his birthday bash. Milland's performance is the perfect blend of charm and nastiness, with just enough cynicism, condescension, and disillusionment thrown in for good measure. This isn't an actor "phoning in a performance" or taking a role to make a quick buck. In *Frogs*, Ray Milland is every bit the legendary leading man, relishing a role that befits his aging body, but still giving it his all.

So how did the first Welshman to ever win an Academy Award segue into these roles? By the fifties and sixties Ray Milland started working on television, even enjoying a couple of his own short-lived shows. Appearances on *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* and *Rod Serling's Night Gallery* helped ease his transition into the world of "B" horror, sci-fi, and suspense. By the late sixties and early seventies, Milland was also regularly appearing in TV movies with a quasi horror-supernatural-thriller theme, such as *Daughter of the Mind* (1969), *Black Noon* (1971), and *The Dead Don't Die* (with George Hamilton, 1975).

Yet, Milland's first flirtation with science fiction and horror films occurred many years prior, in 1944 with *The Uninvited*—a well-received, classic haunted house thriller. But his full emersion into the horror/sci-fi genre occurred in the early 1960s with the apocalyptic *Panic in Yeer Zero* (with Milland in the director's chair) and the Roger Corman directed *The Premature Burial* (both 1962). Hence, it was none other than the grand old man of "B" movies that led Ray astray. Consequently, it was the success of another Roger Corman-helmed production that firmly established Ray Milland as a horror and sci-fi convert.

X. The Man with the X-Ray Eyes was produced and directed by Corman in 1963. The film was praised by the *Los Angeles Times* as "harrowing and terrifying" and even went on to win the Silver Spaceship best film award at the First International Festival of Science Fiction Films.

Milland stars as Dr. James Xavier, a medical doctor hell-bent on increasing man's ocular abilities far beyond that of the known world. Dr. Xavier despises that man can only see "1/10 of the viewing spectrum." He fervently desires to peer into the other ninety percent. When his friend and fellow doctor warns, ". . . only the gods see all," Xavier retorts, "Yes, but I'm closing in on them." And thus the hubris begins.

Like many a "mad" doctor, Xavier's motives stem from the purely altruistic. Through his experiments he seeks to truly advance medical science by becoming some sort of human X-ray machine. And he does just that. However, Milland's mad doctor is no disheveled wreck, working maniacally in a secret laboratory of a ruined castle or derelict Victorian mansion. His laboratory, full of the requisite, colorful bubbling beekers and test tubes, is in a proper hospital; his research is funded by the largesse of a legitimate foundation.

Milland as Dr. James Xavier, in *X: The Man with the X-Ray Eyes* (1963).

This frenzied physician is no slouch, no unkempt hair or wrinkled lab coat. Dr. "X" is almost always impeccably dressed, rarely seen out of a stylish suit complete with Windsor-knotted necktie. He even finds time to dance and flirt with ladies half his age at a cocktail party, "seeing" through their clothes and thoroughly enjoying the view. Milland handles this humorous scene as an old pro, one who had romanced many of Hollywood's legendary leading ladies on film.

Not hindered by the death of his lab monkey, the dapper doctor puts drops of his secret "X" solution into his own eyes. The effect is almost immediate, and Dr. Xavier is able to "see" into a patient, discerning that she has been misdiagnosed. While assisting in her operation, he purposefully incapacitates the attending physician who would have operated on the wrong organ. "X" commandeers the operation and saves a little girl's life, but ruins his career.

Like many a scientist blinded by his desires, Dr. Xavier vehemently refuses to conclude his experiments even after his benefactor ends their munificence. His friends and colleagues advise him to halt the research as well. Dr. Xavier continues regardless of their protests. Unfortunately, things take a turn for the worse when Xavier accidentally kills a fellow doctor and is forced to continue his research "on the lam."

Dr. "X" quickly realizes that his magic eye drops have a cumulative effect on his X-ray powers. His disorienting, *pathécolored* world increases exponentially as Xavier continues as his own guinea pig. Although the special effects might be considered cheesy by today's standards, to an early 1960s audience those *Spectarama* skeletons and vibrantly colored visions of Dr. "X" were most likely very thrilling.

Hiding from the law as a cheap sideshow act for a dishonest carnival barker (played with the usual aplomb by Don Rickles), Xavier is discovered by the doctor whose foundation initially funded his research. Rather than turn him in, she agrees to take him to Las Vegas so the doctor can use his powers to garner as much quick cash as necessary to carry on his experimentation.

On the drive to Vegas, Milland waxes poetic about buildings being nothing but girders stripped of their stone, of the world being laid bare for him to see, "the whole of humanity pressing down on me. The city unborn. Flesh dissolved in an acid of light." In the hands of a less skilled actor such lines might ring hollow or even comical, but Milland delivers them with just the right amount of intensity and soulfulness.

Naturally, things go awry in Vegas when casino officials become highly suspicious of Dr. Xavier's winning streak, his luck being aided by his X-ray eyes. The film comes to a climax after an action packed car-helicopter chase, Xavier's X-ray vision now so concentrated he can hardly perceive the normal world. The film's finale must have been shocking to an audience of nearly fifty years ago and still carries weight even today. Not to spoil the ending, but suffice to say, Dr. Xavier is "saved" as the credits roll.

Despite early success in *X: The Man with the X-Ray Eyes*, Milland's role in the campy, horror-blaxploitation hybrid, *The Thing with Two Heads*, is definitely his most famous "B" offering. This 1972 A.I.P. cult classic could certainly compete with *Frogs* for the "best bad movie ever" title. The premise of this movie is laughable today (and probably was in the early seventies as well)—a wealthy, dying white racist has his head attached to the body of a "colored" death row prisoner. Hilarity ensues.

Milland is Dr. Max Kirshner, the foremost organ transplant surgeon in the country. Unfortunately, the affluent Kirshner, whose medical center bares his name, is besieged by advanced lung cancer and desires a new body. Having succeeded with the full head transplant of a gorilla, Dr. Max plans to make medical history by transplanting his own head onto the body of a healthy person. His plans are slightly thwarted, however, when his cancer threatens his life before the "proper" body can be procured. Enter death row inmate, Jack Moss, played by former NFL great Roosevelt "Rosey" Grier.

With no time to lose, Kirshner's crack surgical team secretly transplants Dr. Kirshner's head onto Moss' body. After a month, Moss' head is to be lopped off, thus the convict has only bought an extra thirty days in volunteering to "donate his body to science." When Dr. Kirshner awakens during post op, he is none too happy about having his head affixed to the body of a large black man; Jack Moss, on the other hand, seizes the opportunity of an extra month on earth to clear his name of a crime he didn't commit.

"The Thing" breaks lose from the doctor's posh mansion and police pursue it with the type of ineptness only possible on film. Once Moss commandeers a dirt bike at a Motocross event, there's no turning back. We witness the Oscar-winning Milland (often times just his dummy head) fastened to Rosey Grier's body and careening over the hills and dips of a desert race course. This motorcycle-car-helicopter chase has to be one of the longest in Hollywood history, punctuated only by occasional dialogue from Milland as he spouts lines like: "You're going to get us killed, you black bastard" or "get me off of this infernal machine."

The two-headed "monster" outruns the authorities, destroying a dozen or so police vehicles in the process, and Dr. Kirshner ends up the pawn of Moss, his girlfriend, and a black doctor who Kirshner earlier spurned as "one of *you* people."

Two heads aren't always better than one. Milland with Rosey Grier in *The Thing with Two Heads* (1972).

One of the film's highlights occurs when Moss is reunited with his girlfriend and wants to get "groovy" with her. She can't quite warm up to the idea of making love to a two-headed creature—yet. Grier glances at Milland's head and quips, "Oh . . . I got to get rid of you!" Milland's reactions during the scene are priceless. Shortly thereafter, the film ends rather abruptly; needless to say, both Dr. Kirshner and Jack Moss are "freed" of one another.

The special effects during the head transplant are surprisingly well done and hold up even in the age of CGI. Not so much for the obvious fake head stuck to Rosey Grier's body for most of the picture. As for Milland, he is once again in his element portraying the rich man's Archie Bunker—a privileged, chauffeur-driven doctor who, much like Jason Crockett, can no longer control the world around him, especially his own mortality. This time it isn't an amphibian revolution that threatens, but instead it's Dr. Max Kirshner's own bigotry in an age when he can no longer order non-whites to the back of the bus. Milland plays the role to perfection.

In his later years, Milland appeared twice with horror icon Peter Cushing in *The Uncanny* (1977) and in the made-for-TV *Sherlock Holmes and the Masks of Death* (1984). Other horror flicks in his final years include: *The House in Nightmare Perk* (1977), *The Attic* (1980), a remake of *Terror in the Wax Museum* (1973), *Look What's Happened to Rosemary's Baby* (1976), and *Cruise into Terror* (1978). His final film appearance is as a professor in the 1984 camp monster movie, *The Sea Serpent*.

Ray Milland never threw in the towel. In a career that spanned fifty-five years, he appeared in every film genre possible alongside some of the greatest names in Hollywood.

Audiences will long remember the cool and calculating husband who blackmails an old friend into strangling Grace Kelly in *Dial M for Murder*. Likewise, his Academy Award-winning turn as an alcoholic battling for control of his life from the bottle in *The Lost Weekend* will always draw plaudits from film fans. Yet, filmdom shouldn't forget or discount Jason Crockett, Dr. Max Kirshner, Dr. James Xavier, or any of Milland's other roles in less-than-top-notch films.

A true actor savors the challenge of a new role, regardless of age, infirmity, or the size of a film's budget. Whether in a low-budget horror-science fiction film or major studio production, Ray Milland must have truly loved acting. He kept at it until the very end, exploring roles and creating characters in projects that many actors of his generation would have dismissed out of hand. Working until the bitter end, Ray Milland portrayed his last character, an oceanographer in *The Sea Serpent*, while dying of cancer.

Most great film actors are adept at certain roles in specific genres. Ray Milland, however, was truly a man for *all* genres. His continuous presence on screen from the early days of talkies until the mid-1980s bridged the gap between classic Hollywood and modern low-budget filmmaking. From Paramount Studios' highly popular leading man of the thirties and forties, to the star of many a "B" outing in the sixties and seventies, Ray Milland excelled at his craft, never allowing a film's budget, or a dubious script, to get in the way of what he obviously loved doing most—acting.

DVD REVIEWS

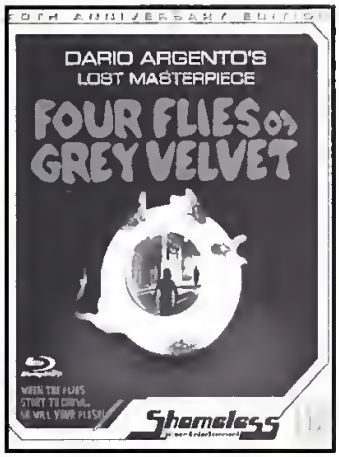
FOUR FLIES ON GREY VELVET
(4 mosche di velluto grigio)
Directed by Dario Argento
(1971) Shameless Entertainment Import Blu-ray / DVD

The most elusive Dario Argento film has steadily remained a popular item on the grey market ever since the home video explosion in the 1980s, the decade also in which appreciation for the Italian director began to swell. This third entry in the so-called "Animal" trilogy, following 1970's galvanizing giallo debut *The Bird with the Crystal Plumage* (*L'Uccello dale piume di cristello*) and 1971's *The Cat O'Nine Tells* (*Il Gatto e nove code*), was the first to be snatched up for American distribution via a major studio, in this case Paramount Pictures (on the bottom-half of a double-bill with Robert Aldrich's *Ulzana's Raid*). To be sure, it was a smart business move at the time, but, until now, a decision that has retroactively made it difficult for DVD companies to locate and secure the rights for this little seen playful psychosexual masterwork. Obsessed and infused with confused gender politics and religious connotations, *Four Flies* sees Argento in familiar trappings, with a youthful protagonist professing his innocence against a faultily perceived guilty act—with the backdrop of an unseen psycho killer untiringly picking off the man's friends and acquaintances.

Roberto Tobias (Michael Brandon) is a happy-go-lucky rock drummer, married to cold beauty Nina (Mimsy Farmer, sporting a close-cropped blonde hairdo), and residing in a stylish, spacious flat in Rome. After catching a suspicious fedora-adorned man tailing him for a number of days, Tobias exasperatedly confronts and corners him in an ornate concert hall. The man pretends to be oblivious of his past encounters with Tobias before brandishing a knife and threatening him. A bright, blinding light goes off in the balcony as Tobias fends for his life, accidentally turning the switchblade into the unknown man's stomach as a sinister, smirking masked figure emerges from up above, snapping photos of Tobias' apparent murder of the man as he falls into the orchestra pit. The next day, Tobias receives an envelope in the mail with a number of photographs of the incident. Blackmail! Tobias enlists the help of a couple of fringe characters, namely 'God', or Godfrey (comedic Eurocult western and action star Bud Spenser), his biblical-spouting disciple, known only as The Professor (Oreste Lionello), and the flaming homosexual private investigator Gianni Arrosio (Jean-Pierre Marielle). Throw in Tobias's brief affair with his wife's cousin, a mail carrier who refuses to stop delivering Swedish pornography, and a number of self-contained, fantastically rendered murder set pieces with Argento at the height of his artistry before the identify of the twisted assailant is revealed through scientific invention and you would have been watching *Four Flies on Grey Velvet*.

Argento's penchant for subjectively-placed artifice is on full display here, as even in the opening credits—Tobias's psychedelic band jam contrasted over blackness with the sounds and images of a palpitating heart—there's an oval-shaped P.O.V. from the inside of an acoustic guitar, the band on full display as a hand defiantly strums the six strings located in front. There is a whimsical remove in the film's attitude and in both camera placement and movement, at least more so than in *Crystal Plumage* or *Cat O'Nine Tails*, perhaps speaking of a need in Argento to recharge his batteries before coming back with what most would deem his definitive vision of the gialli—*Deep Red* (*Profondo Rosso*) (1975). He's never exactly on autopilot, but three configurations and re-workings of the similar thematic material inherent in the giallo must have been taking its toll on the director, and it shows in the humor belabored in the caricatured characterizations. The mailman, for instance, mugs in every appearance he puts in, and an extended sequence set inside an art exhibit for elaborately designed and grandiose coffins deals exclusively with tired puns. Still, Argento in relaxed mode is not necessarily a bad thing as it provides a certain degree of charm in the dark humor so affluent in the peripheral characters even if such segues happen to be detrimental to the central machinations of the plot and its hero.

Argento's handling of the death of Amelia, Tobias' greedy maid, is but an unrivaled homage to the scene in Hitchcock's *The Birds* where Tippi Hedren is quietly visited by an escalating number of fowl. First, Argento establishes how her avariciousness isn't going to pay off (finding some incriminating evidence while cleaning, she tries to reason with the as-yet unknown murderer) by craning and funously panning along with the cords running from the wiretapped payphone she's using. Then, in a crowded park, twilight envelopes her just as the birds did for Hitchcock, as time flies and the last remaining visitors (a boy in a deep-red sweatshirt and his father) leave, the clanking of the metal gates resounding in finality. The park seemingly becomes more and more cloistered, fencing Amelia in, first byway of two set apart rows of shrubs and then the narrower buildings that block her escape on both the right and left sides. In a peculiar, if courteous, move for the flashy, unrelenting Argento, the film doesn't stick with Amelia and her torturous suspenseful set-up, choosing instead to temporarily cut to unknown passerby in the street listening in on her unseen horrors. It's but one of the two central murders (the other being the immaculately white washroom murder-by-injection of the limp-wristed, dated portrayal of the homosexual Arrosio) that stand out as notable examples in the career of Argento for either showing restraint or sincere gravitas of the situation; here, murder isn't treated solely as Grand Guignol, or devotedly portrayed with artistic brio.



What to say of the dubious scientific practice that helps to suss out the meaning of the up-until-then nonsensical title *Four Flies on Grey Velvet*? In the third act, after the murder of Nina's cousin (itself a reinvention of the staircase murder of Arbogast in *Psycho*, as a slashing, mirrored blade trips the victim, her head slapping against every step on the way down), the underrepresented police force reveals that a cutting-edge breakthrough has been made. The last remaining image on the deceased's retina can be maintained for a few hours following death, allowing the opportunity to be photographed on a crude device (the eyeball literally plucked out and stuck rudely onto a contraption!). In this case, the visual evidence is of the titular four flies, only making sense once Tobias catches Nina with a broach containing a solitary crafted fly. the image burned onto the victim's retina being but a swinging reflection of the broach in mid-motion. As Tobias persistently sits at home awaiting his attacker, he places a phone call to 'God', foregoing his support, reasoning that it's something he must do alone; following the hang-up, Argento cuts to a high-angled, omnipresent view of the apartment, God's presence being felt even if not currently in the room. It's no surprise, then, to have Spenser appear as a *deus ex machina*, chasing the "crazy" Nina out of the room and into her car, where Tobias' forerunning, frequent nightmares of an executioner decapitating a guilty prisoner reserves its fate instead for Nina.

Mimsy Farmer's performance as the tormented Nina is alternately sullen and reserved before its final disclosure of unprovoked hostility towards the male gender. Her father having wanting a male heir to his untold fortunes, she was raised as a boy and brought up, at least partly, inside a padded white room (reverberations of the pale tiles seen in Arrosio's lavatory death); Argento's camera reels in 360-degree moves inside these spaced flashbacks, as a stentorian voice shouts at the unobserved child. This inciting Freudian occurrence mars her life, forever ruining the chances at a normal existence (such devastating childhood psychological disruptions being apparent in many of Argento's gialli 'surprise' murderers). Some critics have belabored the point that Michael Brandon makes for a boring lead, but he perfectly captures a certain arrogance amongst the jet-setting young that one could say Argento himself partook in at the time of the film was made (there are no moral repercussions for cheating on his wife, for instance). In fact, much has been said of his raven-haired locks and deep-pocketed eyes that make him almost an Argento substitute (some crew members have even stated that actress Farmer was largely cast because she resembled Argento's first wife!) Other actors (perhaps apocryphal stories, one and all) in the running for the lead role were John Lennon, Ringo Starr, Terence Stamp, and *Logan's Run*'s Michael York.

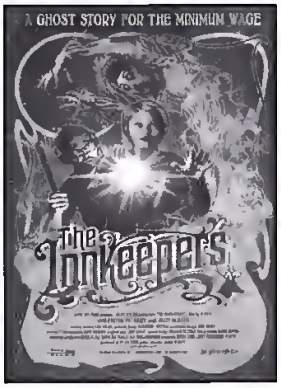
Finally, Ennio Morricone would compose his last score for an Argento picture until 1996's *The Stendhal Syndrome* (*La Sindrome di Stendhal*) after a falling-out resulted in Argento looking elsewhere for *The Five Days in Milan* (his choice, Goblin, being truly inspired). Morricone's really put through the paces here, with everything from percussion-centric acid-rock to "Like a Madrigal", the haunting, lilting closing cut that accompanies one of three truly transcendental decapitations in cinema history (the others being Mario Bava's *Kill, Baby . . . Kill!* (*Operazione paura*) and Fellini's *Toby Dammit* from *Spirits of the Dead*).

Argento cohort and co-writer Luigi Cozzi is the go-to guy for extras on Argento's giallo films when the auteur himself isn't available, so it's no surprise that Shameless's 40th Anniversary blu brings Cozzi into the mix. There's a 40-odd minute interview that covers the influences and their writing process, as well as a brief introduction. Theatrical trailers round out the disc.

Having this lost masterpiece in an almost pristine transfer, anamorphic and on the Blu-ray format is a welcome gift for Argento enthusiasts once relegated to viewing shoddy bootleg copies. In the animal trilogy, it's personally my favorite, with *Crystal Plummage* a close second. The extras may be negligible in adding context, but the film itself is the main attraction. Perhaps one of the best horror releases of the year.

Aaron Graham

THE INNKEEPERS
Directed by Ti West
(2011) Dark Sky Blu-ray/ DVD



Claire and Luke (Sara Paxton and Past Healy) are two slacker pals entrusted to take care of the Yankee Pedlar Inn, an old time Connecticut hotel in its final days before its date with a wrecking ball. The temporary gig has its benefits: both are amateur parapsychologists determined to find if the purported ghost of Madeline O'Malley still roams the halls. A jilted bride, O'Malley hung herself at the hotel on her wedding day at the turn of the century. The owners, fearing negative publicity for the inn hid her corpse in the basement until the inevitable stench gave them away. A cantankerous old actress (Kelly McGillis), at the hotel for an in-town psychic convention warns Sara to not go into the basement. An old man (George Riddle) with a secret to hide checks in one night and Sara, with her Radio Shack Ghostbusters equipment decides to investigate the basement anyway—with horrifying results.

Director Ti West's follow-up to his horror hit *The House of the Devil* (2010), *The Innkeepers*, like its predecessor has a minimal cast, one location and very little explicit violence. *Innkeepers*, in fact has even less blood and gore than *Devil*! Both films evoke memories of such late Seventies, early Eighties spookers such as *Silent Scream* (1980). While *House*, with its strikingly simple story and emphasis on chills—rather than spills of blood was embraced by the Internet generation, *Innkeepers* has generated a somewhat negative buzz. Some viewers felt that *Innkeepers* was "too light hearted" to succeed, and that the scares were far too far and few between.

This criticism is unfounded to a certain degree, as *The Innkeepers* comes on with the scares early on, whereas House had a "slow burn" approach. Admittedly, most of the frights here are of the stapled on, false variety, such as a phony haunted Internet video with a shock surprise ending shared by Luke on his laptop. Those who find the film to "light hearted" due to the comic banter of the two leads seem to ignore all the tragedy that hangs about the film. There is an element of high tragedy in the fact that the stately Gothic hotel is set to be torn down. There is also a pervasive tinge of scandal and suicide that roams the halls just as surely as any phantom, and the actress played by McGillis is washed-up and past her prime—as Luke says of her late career choice as a psychic, "she's just trying to remain relevant."

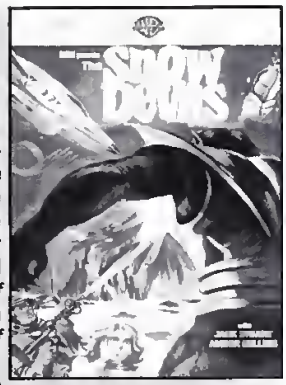
Director West says that the film was inspired by the hotel that the cast and crew of *House of the Devil* stayed at, which he claims was scarier than the motion picture project at hand. Inn, hotels and motels are inherently creepy; long hallways full of impersonal rooms, hosting people who are away from familiar places. *The Innkeepers* pays specific reference to a larger, grander haunted house film—although the ghost that appears here will not inspire anyone to play forever and ever and ever there.

The Innkeepers can be appreciated for its uncompromised approach at subtle, old-school horrors. One regrets that the only way the film could have a successful widescreen release would be in adapting the "found footage" route in the manner of *The Devil Within* and the *Paranormal Activity* series. This approach, however, doesn't rely on directorial slight-of-hand or skill, but merely on cheap, obvious gimmickry.

The Innkeepers can be recommended for old-school horror fans who value the kind of chills that come with understatement. As if in response to those expecting more, director West—quite literally, ends this film with a door being slammed in the collective face of less patient fright film fans.

Greg Goodsell

THE SNOW DEVILS
Directed by Anthony Dawson
(aka Antonio Margheriti)
(1967) Warner Archives



Like many Italian directors and actors working in the mass-produced genre films of the 1960s, Margheriti changed his neme in his credits. It was believed that Italian audiences at the time preferred watching American films, and it also helped when these films were distributed abroad. He is perhaps best known to horror genre fans for his contribution to the Italian gothic cycle inspired by the work of Mario Bava. In 1963 he made *The Virgin of Nuremberg* (aka *Castle of Terror*) with Christopher Lee, and in 1964 he directed the classics *Danza Macebra* (aka *Castle of Blood*) and *The Long Heir of Death*, both with Barbara Steele. Italian cinema in the 1960s was thriving, and Margheriti also churned out sword and sandal epics, westerns, spy flicks and even giallo. Later in his career he contributed to one of Italy's most notorious horror sub-genres with the exploitative *Cannibal Apocelypse* (1980). Working with him on a great number of these films as first or second assistant director, including *The Snow Devils*, was Ruggero Deodato, who became a prolific director himself before making his name with the equally notorious *Cannibal Holocaust* (also 1980).

The Snow Devils (known in Italy as *Death Comes From the Planet Aytin*) is part of what became known as Margheriti's Gamma One cycle. These films (which also include *Wild, Wild Planet*, *War of the Planets* and *War Between the Planets*) are based around the Gamma One space station, but they are not direct sequels, featuring a variety of characters and unrelated plots. The connection was clearly there to reuse the same costumes, sets and miniatures, particularly as it is claimed that they were all shot in the same three month period. The film was clearly shot in English with a view to American distribution, and all four films in the cycle were co-financed by MGM. American money was pouring into the Italian industry throughout the decade, thanks in part to the fantastic factory-like production facilities at Cinecittà Studios in Rome, one of the biggest film studios in Europe. Contrary to popular belief, *The Green Slime* was an unofficial fifth contribution to the Gamma One senes, and had no involvement from Margheriti.

The main star of *The Snow Devils*, billed as Jack Stuart, is actually prolific Italian actor Giacomo Rossi-Stuart. He is square-jawed and immaculately coiffured, like a young Doug McClure. You may remember him from such films as Bava's *Kill, Baby Kill* (1966) or the classic *The Last Man on Earth* (1964), where as Ben Cortman he relentlessly terrorised Vincent Price with cries of "Morgan!" In this film he is dubbed by an unnamed American actor, as are practicably all of the cast. As Commander Jackson, also seen in *War between the Planets*, he acts as some sort of intergalactic trouble shooter. In this case, he has to solve the mystery of a destroyed weather station in the Himalayas and unexplained temperature rises in the North Pole. The locals say it is the work of a yeti, or snow devil, and they have plaster casts of massive footprints to prove it. Commander Jackson leads an expedition across the snowy wastes with his second in command and Lisa, a beautiful stowaway who is the fiancé of one of the men killed when the station was smashed to pieces. She is emotionally unstable, but thankfully Commander Jackson is able to comfort her the only way a man should. When they get lost in the mountains they stumble into a cave system, and straight into the arms of a whole tribe of yetis, only these are like no abominable snowmen you have ever seen. They are men with green skin and hairy arms and beards, all wearing what look like old green wrestling leotards. They have extremely large hairy feet, rather like hobbits. The caves are full of complex machinery and computer equipment, which comes as something of a relief after the rather lengthy snow-treking scenes. Suddenly the film becomes sci-fi again, as it is revealed that the yeti are actually e race of aliens trying to first flood the Earth and then freeze it, so it can match the frozen wastelands of their dying home planet. This handy piece of exposition is explained by the chief yeti. We know he is the chief by the fact that he is wearing a red Superman cape over his wrestling leotard. The costume design for these aliens is a source of great unintentional comedy.

When they are thrown into a cell they find to Lisa's delight and Commander Jackson's undoubted disappointment her missing fiancé, and together they hatch an escape plan that involves poisoning the alien fiends with gas made in their own lab. Why you would leave such things lying around for prisoners to use against you is a mystery. Although the case seems closed, the film is not even halfway through yet. Thankfully the remainder of the film involves having to attack another alien base out in space, via a visit to the revolving wheel-shaped space station of Gamma One. The joy of these films comes from the sexy space suits, fantastic *Jetsons*-style cars and the use of miniatures to create *Thunderbirds*-like cityscapes, rocket ships, meteors and full on space battles. The Gamma One films were clearly an inspiration to Gerry Anderson's own live action work in shows like *UFO* or *Space: 1999*. Where *The Snow Devils* suffers in comparison with the other films is that you have to wait so long before you really get to the fun stuff, but it is well worth the wait. The scene when Commander Jackson and his men space walk through a meteor field placing bombs has to be seen to be believed. Ruggero Deodato told this writer that although Marghereti was a great friend, he felt these Gamma One films were terrible because all of the attention was spent on the miniatures and not on the script or the acting. This may be true, but the films are all the more enjoyable because of it. The script is full of laugh-out-loud moments of casual misogyny and cod-heroics, made even more comical by the dubbing. Although this is nowhere near as whacked out as *Wild, Wild Planet* (also available from Warner Archive), a film so bizarre it lingers long in the memory, *The Snow Devils* is still an enjoyable slice of cheesy 1960s hokum.

Adrian Smith

PEEPING TOM
Directed by Michael Powell
(1960)Optimum/Studio Canal Blu-ray (region B import)

Outwardly Mark Lewis (Carl Boehm) appears much akin to any other young man of his generation. Blonde-haired, blue-eyed and strikingly handsome, Mark is always seen to be impeccably dressed and groomed and scarcely far from his hand-held camera that he puts to use filming all manner of things around him at every opportunity. He undertakes a regular job as a focus puller with the small Chipperfield Films Studio and supplements his income with "glamour photogrephy" for a dubious newsagency in Soho. Of an evening he retires to his home left to him by his late father, where he rents out rooms to maintain its upkeep. Yet behind the façade, Mark is in fact a serial killer.

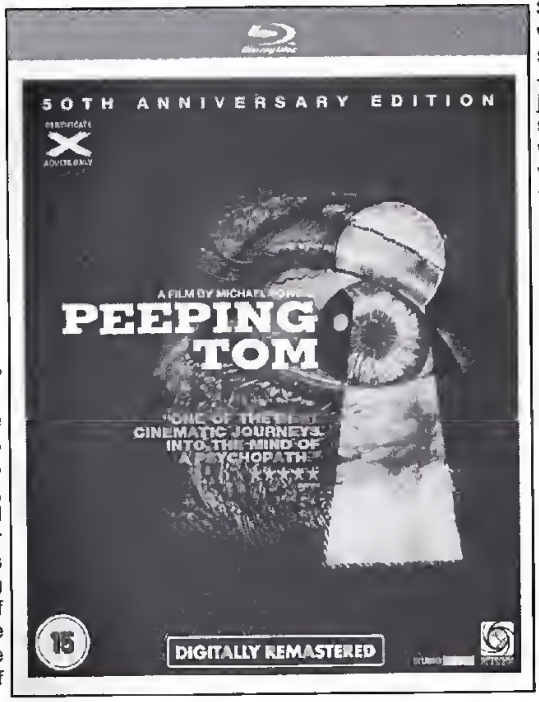
Obsessed with keeping his father's documented psychiatric study of fear and its effect on the nervous system alive, Mark has taken to murdering young women and filming the horror of their death-throes for his own perverse documentary. When the daughter of his downstairs tenant, Mrs. Stephens (Maxine Audley), strikes up a friendship with him a vestige of normalcy begins to permeate Mark's fractured double-life. Helen (Anna Massey) becomes the light of happiness missing from his tortured existence. But when studio extra Vivian (Moira Shearer) goes missing one evening, the discovery of her body and subsequent police investigation may just prove to be Mark's eventual undoing.

At the time of *Peeping Tom*'s original release the British film industry was undergoing something of an upheaval, by way of both its (then) contemporary identity with the emergence of a "New Wave" inspired French cinema's growing *Nouvelle Vague* movement and the (largely critically dismissed) commercial eppeal of modestly budgeted genre fare that had exploded out of Hammer Films' experimentations in the medium in the late fifties. The *New Weve* had given rise to productions steeped in hitherto unseen social realism, as typified by early outings such as *Room et the Top* (1959) and *Look Back in Anger* (1959), whereas Hammer's mainstream growth had attracted international attention (and investors) with their colour remakes of classic horror iconography. It appeared that the golden age of British cinema, as signified by the output of legendary production houses such as Ealing Studios, were coming to an end. Yet, amidst the evolving face of contemporary cinema, one of its *wunderkinds*, Michael Powell (*The Life end Death of Colonel Blimp*, 1943), delivered a feature that flew in the face of convention, drew widespread vitriol and proved the antithesis of his most critical lauded productions of the past.

Where the Hammer horrors were firmly rooted in literary-based fantasy, and emergent "*Kitchen Sink dramas*" had started to explore every day social issues, Powell's *Peeping Tom* (1960) put forth propositions that the majority considered unthinkable: a) its titular character, e disturbed serial killer, was not only explored delicately but with a strong degree of sympathy, and b) it was a shocking excursion into themes and a genre largely alien to one of the country's most respected filmmakers. The latter part of that equation has been dealt with, at length, in the years since the film's release but the public vilification it received never destroyed Powell's career as has often been alleged, merely sabotaged his abilities to procure successive work in the UK. This led to feature work in Australia during the mid-sixties that produced an iconic adaptation of John O'Grady's (under the pseudonym Nino Culotta) comic social commentary, *They're a Weird Mob* (1966) and the later *Age of Consent* (1969) with James Mason and a young Helen Mirren. Of the former, Powell's examination of the psychology of a murderer as channelled through the bravura performance of Carl Boehm was decades ahead of its time.

As written by Leo Marks (*Twisted Nerve*, 1968), directed by Powell and interpreted by Boehm, even by contemporary measures Merk Lewis is an anomaly in the world of genre cinema. Unlike modern genre cinema, where filmmakers have reverted to clear-cut divisions of black and white (or good and evil, if one prefers) to ensure that the villains are irredeemable as possible and the heroes forthright and righteous, Mark is that dangerous quantity of the unknown. An enigmatic duality that is et once introverted, impeccably mannered and humble and, in his mirror-opposite, possessive of a feverish vigour and obsessiveness once the balance tips in favor of his murderous side. There is no denying that, as strongly suggested by Powell, Mark draws a perverse sexual release from reliving his murders (as evidenced by his emotional reaction to a replay of the first murder early in the film), but there is also the heavy implication that he longs to be discovered so that his nightmarish existence, and the extension of his father's experiments, might come to an end. It is this facet of the character that awards Boehm's character his sympathetic edge; Lewis knows what he is doing is wrong, but lacks the inner strength to deny his dark side its desires as his psychosis is too deeply entrenched. It is only through the intervention of outsiders, as well as the flickering flame of normalcy produced through his relationship with Helen, that he might be eble to break free of himself and end his torment.

For the British audiences of 1960, such an unconventional portrait of a murderer must have been overwhelmingly confronting (even from a contemporary standpoint the film retains its power to unsettle and disturb the more literary viewer) as, outside of Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) and late-fifties *grand guignol* of the Hammer horrors, there had perhaps been nothing so challenging attempted in cinema since Fritz Lang's groundbreaking *M* (1931). Doubly so as Powell elected to put his audience in the frontline with a series of point-of-view shots, cleverly framed through the viewfinder of a camera, making them complicit voyeurs in the act of murder. Surprisingly, as detailed in a latter day study by the British censorship board, the BBFC, it wasn't so much that area that disturbed the mainstream audiences and critics as much as Powell's decision to use himself and son Columba as Mark and his father in Lewis' home movies. Similarly, though not so much acknowledged at the time as addressed in late-period studies, *Peeping Tom* brought to the fore a world most audiences would have preferred to recognise much less explicitly: that of Soho's seamier underbelly where seedy nightclubs, streetwalkers and "under-the-counter" pornography jostled side-by-side in salacious fashion to lure end win over the everyday voyeur who partook their vices in private.



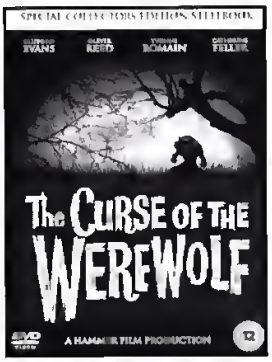
However, for all of its controversial subject matter, *Peeping Tom* remains a relatively bloodless horror piece (thanks in no small part to the intervention of the BBFC) and instead holds it weight as an intense, sometimes blackly comic, character study. Although Boehm is undeniably the centrepiece of the entire work, his supporting cast all fall into place beside his performance like cogs in a well-oiled machine Anna Massey (*Bunny Lake is Missing*, 1965) strikes just the right notes of girlish naivety coupled with an inquisitiveness and revulsion at Mark's more compulsive traits, where Maxine Audley (*Hell is* e *City*, 1960), essaying her blind alcoholic mother, defaults as the narrative's conscience. Even though her character is blind, Mrs. Stephens possesses enough intuition and heightened sense of perception thet she immediately pegs Mark as something out of the ordinary. The confrontation between the two in the latter part of the film still holds as one of the film's more unnerving moments. The presence of Pamela Green, as glamour model Millie, is something of an eye catcher as Green herself had long been known as a photographic model and worked with the (in)famous George Harrison Marks (*Neked as Nature Intended*, 1961); Green's casting could logically be compared with contemporary cinema where adult actors are employed in mainstream film. Thereafter the cast is rounded out with Jack Watson (*The Gorgon*, 1964) as the stern Inspector Gregg, a young Shirley Ann Field (*These are the Damned*, 1963) and a cameo by Miles Malleson (*The Brides of Dracula*, 1960) as a middle-aged connoisseur of "views" (nude photographs).

Where fans of the Universal horrors of the thirties and forties are often dismissive of the Hammer films of the fifties and sixties, there is arguably the assurance that fans of seventies-through-contemporary genre filmmaking may little find little of relevance to them with *Peeping Tom*, a film belatedly acclaimed as one of director Michael Powell's masterworks. That much may be true as, being a product of its era and censorship climate (late-nineties efforts to restore the film proved fruitless when all avenues for BBFC trims were exhausted), Powell's film might seem tame, even coy, by modern standards. Yet, as a production from the filmmaker who gave us *The Red Shoes* (194B) and *Tales of Hoffman* (1951) it's a dramatic about-face in a former golden career and an exploration of the mind of a killer that was years ahead of its time. While gore-hounds and "extreme" horror geeks will find little in it beyond its template of the future, the more literate film student or aficionado will see much within *Peeping Tom* that American director Martin Scorsese came to admire Although its acting styles and (then) contemporary setting, as well as its extant technologies, may have dated it Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* remains one of the greats of experimentel genre cinema and one that challenges its audience as much to their own voyeurism as its titular character.

Michael Thomason

THE CURSE OF THE WEREWOLF

Directed by Terence Fisher
(1961)Universal / Final Cut Entertainment Region 2 DVD
(limited edition: 2000 copies)



Hammer's first (and only) take on the werewolf theme was also the first "classic" monster movie from the studio to not feature the team of Peter Cushing and Christopher Lee. Instead, the spotlight was placed on a young up-and-comer by the name of Oliver Reed, and the rest, as they say . . .

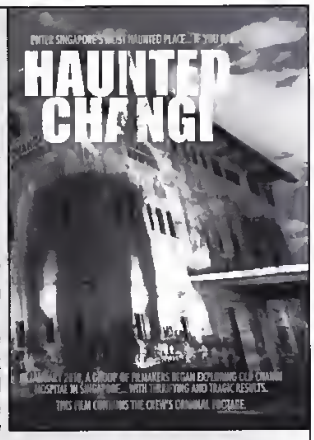
But for all that, Reed doesn't appear until fully halfway through *The Curse of the Werewolf*, adapted by producer Anthony Hinds (as "John Elder") from Guy Endore's novel *The Werewolf of Peris* but transposed to a Spanish setting so as to take advantage of sets built for an unrealized Hammer production. The buildup is a nasty horror story in its own right, as a mad beggar (imprisoned by a cruel Marquis, unforgettably played by Anthony Dawson) rapes a mute servant girl (Yvonne Romain) before she can make her violent escape. The nameless young lady is eventually taken in by the kindly Don Alfredo (top-billed Clifford Evans)—along with her unborn, unplanned offspring. The unfortunate child (named Leon) is born out of wedlock on Christmes Day itself, and "Heaven" (as depicted through a filter of intense Catholic morality and guilt) takes that as an insult and strikes the infant with a curse (in one of the most memorable scenes in the Hammer canon, the baptismal font literally boils at his approach). But all is not necessarily lost—a strong, loving upbringing eventually helps to keep the manifestly bestial nature of young Leon at bay until he's ready to face the world as a young adult (Reed, of course). And so long as he works hard, keeps his nose in his books and accepts only the love of a "good" woman (even though Christina, as played by Catherine Feller, is promised to another *and* just happens to be the daughter of Leon's employer), his future remains bright . . . but when he gives in to peer pressure for just *one* evening devoted to pleasure and revelry, the wages of sin are even worse than death.

The lead actor may only appear in half of the movie, and the full-fledged werewolf (a stellar make-up job by Roy Ashton, recognizable to fans whether or not they've seen the actual film) isn't glimpsed until the final ten minutes, but none of this works against the film in the slightest: Reed's ferocious performance, the sumptuous sets, the empathetic direction of Terence Fisher and a strong score by Benjamin Frankel keep *The Curse of the Werewolf* rich and entertaining from beginning to end. The question now is this—just how necessary is the new 2-disc import from Final Cut Entertainment? The film itself is an extremely worthwhile acquisition, but if you already happen to own Universal's eight-feature "Hammer Horror Series" Region 1 DVD set, then you already have a copy of *Curse* that's just as good as the one on display here. Disc One of the import set is strictly the bare-bones movie (albeit completely uncensored, which was not always the case in Great Britain). The set's desirability will be determined by one's interest in the 45m documentary "The Making of *Curse of the Werewolf*," which dominates Disc Two and which should certainly please fans of the film. The proceedings are led by Mike Hill, a devoted aficionado and artist who happily displays his amazingly detailed recreation of Ashton's werewolf head (among other three-dimensional goodies) throughout. Hill sets up the story behind the film as he makes the case that Oliver Reed was the single greatest werewolf performer in movie history (sure, it's one thing to compare Reed to Lon Chaney, Jr., but countless eyes will roll when Hill invokes Michael J. Fox in the same breath!). Along the way, we hear from surviving members of the cast and crew, including actresses Catherine Feller and Yvonne Romain, art director Don Mingage and sculptress Mary Robinson, all of whom share their experiences on the set as well as their memories of such departed players as Reed and director Fisher. Oliver Reed himself is heard from in archival audio recordings from 1999 (*Curse* remained one of his favorite films and he had nothing but good things to say about Fisher and Hammer Studios in general), while Hammer screenwriter Jimmy Sangster (who had nothing to do with *Curse*, but who worked with Fisher on many other occasions) appears via a 2011 video interview: ironically, both men made their statements shortly before their respective deaths. Outtakes from the main documentary are distilled into a 3m extra in which the participants discuss the true-life phenomenon of lycanthropy, while a still gallery covers plenty of familiar ground but manages to unearth some previously-unseen promotional materials in the process. The import set (which is limited to 2000 copies) also comes with exclusive liner notes and a set of collector's postcards. As always—the next move is yours.

Shane M. Dallmann

HAUNTED CHANGI

Directed by Andrew Lau
(2010) Seminal Films/ MVD DVD



The Old Changi Hospital (formerly just Changi Hospital) stands amidst overgrown foliage at the eastern tip of Singapore as a monument to its revered past as a British Royal Air Force hospital, and the horrors of its duration as a prison camp under Japanese occupancy during World War II. After the state's Declaration of Independence in 1965, the facilities would eventually be handed over to the Singapore Armed Forces in 1975; whereupon it accommodated the public and military personnel until its closure in 1997. Thereafter strange stories began to emerge about the former POW camp and its grounds, leading the derelict site to become lauded as one of the most haunted properties in the Singapore region.

In January of 2010, it was that very reputation that draws a small independent film crew to document the facility and its grounds as well as explore the myths and urban legends that surround Old Changi Hospital as a Mecca for supernatural activity. Comprising of producer and director Andrew Lau, producer and presenter Sheena Chung, cameraman Audi Khalis and soundman Farid Azlam, the small team interview locals and map out the building's history whilst awaiting shooting permits. Once the permits arrive, the crew swiftly set about filming only to discover that there is indeed disturbing truth to the old stories and an unexpected malevolence amidst the forces trapped within the monolith's crumbling walls, shuttered rooms and hitherto unexplored underground tunnels.

The "found footage" genre has gone through something of a dramatic upswing in recent years, especially within the horror genre where titles like *[rec]* (2007), *Paranormal Activity* (2007) and *Cloverfield* (2008) have won favour (and disdain) with horror-fans and mainstream viewers alike. Arguably originated with Ruggero Deodato's *Cannibal Holocaust* (1979), whose parade of reality-based atrocities initially drew strong censorship condemnation globally and made it virtually impossible to see in undiluted form (or at all, in some territories), the sub-genre sat dormant for almost two decades before Americans Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez revitalised the medium with *The Blair Witch Project* (1999). As much a product of its finely-tuned marketing campaign, that suggested the whole thing was "real" as well as highlighted overwhelming audience reactions with tales of vomit-inducing "motion sickness", *Blair Witch* proved a box-office champion. Unusually, for such a modest investment vs. return format, the formula never really caught on with Asian filmmakers and, outside of Kôji Shiraishi's *Noroi: The Curse* (2005) and Lee Cheol-ha's *Deserted House* (2010), there's been little to no experimentation within the genre from those regions.

Thus, it's something of a surprise that one of Asia's first major stabs at the "found footage" genre should originate from the relatively small enclave that is the Singaporean film industry. More so once you takes into consideration that *Heunted Changi* (2010) was produced outside of the studio system (where domestic entertainment leader Mediacorp Raintree literally dominates the marketplace) on a shoe-string, with a cast of unknowns, and only a viral marketing campaign as promotion once its original backer pulled out a proposed distribution deal (over the film's shooting language, no less). It may come as something of a surprise for our readership, but even as a well-versed Asian cinephile, prior to a screener crossing my desk, I had *never* heard of the production. However I knew of the Old Changi Hospital and its much vaunted history as one of Singapore's most haunted icons, as that knowledge had come to me via a publication on regional paranormal experiences I'd picked up in my travels within Malaysia. However, apart from an official website, dormant filmmakers' production blog and a series of crew profiles on Facebook, turning up anything relating to *Haunted Changi's* production, history or the filmmakers themselves proved almost fruitless.

Designed and executed as an assembly of the footage the onscreen crew shot during production, there are indications here and there throughout the feature that hints things were a lot more polished, and an extremely clever appropriation of documentary style, than one would initially suspect. There's a little post-production digital trickery here, some highly effective editing tricks there, and so on and so forth; yet even with those tweaks the film retains its integrity as a (faux) documentary thanks to a believable cast and well-calculated structure. Following some exhaustive amateur sleuthing, my quest for more information on what had been a very impressive indie production (for me) led to the film's production house, Mythopolis Pictures, and an extended email conversation with the firm's American-born/Singaporean-based co-founder, Tony Kern. Tony imparted a wealth of material relating to the origins of *Haunted Chengi*, its oft-troubled production history and Mythopolis' handling of the end product as delivered on completion. What ultimately emerged from our correspondence was the highly textured canvas Kern painted; that the film was as much a product of its canny viral marketing campaign as the professionalism of the end product. Accordingly, some questions are better left unanswered and a heightened level of uncertainty maintained, as a good magician *never* reveals his secrets.

Those expecting a gruelling experience in unrelenting terror, or shocks and horror every other moment, will largely come away disappointed from *Heunted Changi* as it's the antithesis of that prodivity. The production closely follows the young filmmakers and their varied concerns and interests as they plot out the history of the OCH, with archival WWII footage and "on-the-street" interviews, in the build up to what is the film's drawcard: the shoot inside Changi itself. The whole aesthetic is one of slow-bum, mounting intensity and Leu and his team are utterly believable as the stage is set. Once inside the abandoned premises, everything tips upside-down and proceedings lurch into a wild-eyed madness that is amplified by Kern's impressive high-definition cinematography (which is about the limit of what I'm willing to reveal). The filmmakers have impressively managed to evoke and capture that childhood sense of burgeoning unease that anyone who ever poked around derelict buildings or ruins as a kid has felt. OCH is an imposing structure, and it's rendered perfectly as that eponymous nexus of the paranormal that local legend has created. Of course, once the unearthly denizens of the facility begin to manifest themselves for the cameras we're in really eerie terntory. Be it doors suddenly slamming shut of their own accord, inexplicable shadows showing up on footage post-shoot or, in one skin-crawling sequence, the presence of a mysterious figure appearing out of nowhere in front of the lens, before disappearing into darkness, *Haunted Changi* makes for en unsettling, frequently chilling ride through Singapore's ultimate haunted house.

What really sets *Haunted Changi* apart from many of its peers is the youthful exuberance that twenty-something director Lau (not *the* Andrew Lau, of *Infernal Affairs* fame, I must stress) and his similarly young crew invest the production with. The usage of *Singlish* (colloquial English peppered with vocabulary from the region's varied cross-cultural dialects) adds to the regional flavour of the film, even though its presence was heavily criticised by audiences and reviewers on original release, and lends an even more uniquely Singaporean feel then I would suspect isolated pockets would agree. In essence there is something of TV series *Ghost Hunters International* about the production, albeit on a smaller, non-professional scale and Leu and crew make effective use of night vision photography, motion sensors, time-lapse and hard-hat mounted digi-cams to milk their frightening experience to maximum effect. Whether it's the sudden realisation, thanks to thermal imaging, that they are surrounded by headless ghosts at one point, or Lau's own frenzied point-of-view as he dashes hopelessly lost through the hospitel's long rumoured, previously unexplored, underground tunnels there is always an exhilarating sense of dread that something horrific is going to jump into camera renge at any second. In anyone's books, that is what good genre filmmaking should be about: loss of control and fear of the unknown. As it races to its shock conclusion, *Haunted Changi* is swamped in exactly that tension-laden atmosphere.

As anyone who has reed this far will have guessed by now, I was not only extremely impressed with *Heunted Changi* as a wholly successful South East Asian attempt at the "found footage" genre but, from conversations with *Mythopolis Pictures*' co-founder Tony Kern, am also privy to the eleborate secret behind the enigma that is the film itself (as, excepting a company logo and title card, *Changi* features no credits). *Haunted Changi*'s strengths stem not only from its classically Singaporean appropriation of what had previous been a largely western-dominated sub-genre, but also from the carefully constructed cult of curiosity and cryptography that surrounded its production from inception to release. Far be it from me to spoil that mystery when, almost eighteen months after its release (as of this writing), online forums and social media are still abuzz with lively discussion as to the film's veracity. It mey not be the most earth-shattering "found footage" genre piece international viewers will ever see, but *Haunted Changi* belies its modest roots enough for me to recommend it es an impressively unsettling excursion through a major Asiatic paranormal phenomenon.

For more on *Heunted Changi*, inclusive of the archived production blogs, check out the film's official website at http://hauntedchangi.com. Mythopolis Pictures next feature will be the supernatural detective thriller *Third Eye Open* which can also be reached online at http://thirdeyemovie.com.

Michael Thomason

MYSTERIOUS ISLAND
Directed by Cy Endfield
(1961) Screen Archives Entertainment / Twilight Time Blu-ray

While some of the films featuring the classic stop-motion animation effects of the legendary Ray Harryhausen are memorable *only* for his work, the very best (including *The 7TH Voyage of Sinbad* and *Jason and the Argonauts*) thrill and entertain from beginning to end—and *Mysterious Island* (freshly hot in the form of a contemporary in-name-only 3-D remake) most assuredly belongs in the pantheon. While the aforementioned variant sells itself as a sequel to *Journey to the Center of the Earth*, *Mysterious Island* is actually a follow-up to Jules Verne's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*. The latter, of course, was best known and loved as a classic 1954 Walt Disney production starring Kirk Douglas and featuring James Mason as Captain Nemo, but this 1961 Columbia release wasn't offered as a "sequel" to the Disney film (for obvious reasons).

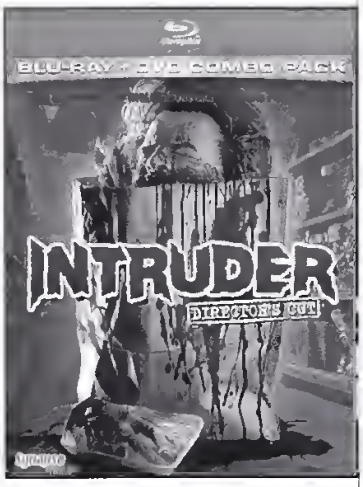
For those who need a refresher on the story, *Mysterious Island* starts off with a daring escape from a Confederate prison during the Civil War—the motley crew that makes its getaway vie hot eir balloon includes the determined Captain Harding (Michael Craig), liberal journalist Gideon Spilitt (Gary Merrill), happy-go-lucky Herbert Brown (dancer Michael Callan), a black Union corporal (Dan Jackson) and a captured Johnny Reb (Percy Herbert) whose life is spared by the escapees. A violent storm blows the crew wildly off course, and their only hope of survival is to make it to an uncharted island luckily spotted in the distance. While the castaways must set aside their political differences and work together to survive if there's to be any thought of escape or rescue, it soon becomes obvious that they're not completely alone. Not only are they quickly joined by two shipwrecked British women (high-living Lady Fairchild and her daughter Elena, played respectively by Joan Greenwood and Beth Rogan), but some unknown benefactor seems to be looking out for them... which is a good thing, because the island is also home to an assortment of deadly giant animals (enter Harryhausen) and a secret drop-off point for a crew of hostile pirates! There's no point in attempting to conceal the fact that Captain Nemo himself (Herbert Lom) is eventually revealed as both the invisible guardian angel and the brains behind the expenments that caused the gigantic mutations in plant and animal life alike—but while his fabulous submarine Nautilus is with him in all its glory, it can never take to the sea again . . .

Mysterious Island remains synonymous with "Harryhausen" for good reason, but the truth is that the film contains only four Dynamation highlights over its 100m running time. The vast majority of the film focuses on the characters themselves as they engage in combat, mutual survival skills and, of course, philosophical debate (Harding and Spilitt argue intensely—but politely—over Nemo's determination to stop war by engaging in war well before they get a chance to take it up with the man himself), and the cast is up to the task of holding the viewer's attention throughout. The monster attacks themselves are well spaced out over the course of the adventure, leading off with the surprise appearance of a giant crab. Next up is one of the strangest and most entertaining sequences in the entire film, in which the survivors are had at by a weird, seemingly prehistoric bird-creature: the danger is very real, but even Bernard Herrmann's excellent, bombastic score here takes an appropnately playful turn. (While frustrating references to the incident were retained in the subsequent dialogue, this scene was always cut from the print on Chicago television to make room for the genial hosting of beloved television personality Frazier Thomas on his Sunday afternoon series *Family Classics*—I was literally a young adult by the time I ever saw the uncut movie!) Things get even better when a giant bee attempts to seal Herbert end Elena up inside a proportionately-oversized honeycomb, and a glowering chambered nautilus (not the submarine named for it) attempts to have its say about the climactic underwater efforts of the crew. The cast, the composer, the production design and the Harryhausen effects are expertly blended throughout, making this Charles H. Schneer production a rousing standout destined to outlast all of its various and sundry pretenders, though oddly enough, it was the only fantastic film directed by Cy Endfield (*Zulu*).

Mysterious Island was previously released on VHS, laserdisc and DVD with supplements ranging from an isolated score to the "This is Dynamation" trailer appended to all such Columbia releases. The limited edition (3000 copies, $34.95 retail) release Blu-Ray rendition from www.screenarchives.com continues to offer the Herrmann soundtrack on a separate channel but limits the visual extras to a theatrical trailer and a television spot. This may disappoint those hoping for a true "Special Edition," but the film itself is surely a sufficiently strong selling point!

Shane M. Dallmann

INTRUDER
Directed by Scott Spiegel
(1989) Synapse Films



This unjustly obscure late-entry slasher film was the brainchild of *Evil Dead II* screenwriter Scott Spiegel, one of Sam Raimi's early filmmaking cohorts during his Super 8 years. Originally called *Night Crew*, the film was based on a short film Spiegel made in Michigan (featuring Raimi in an acting role, with Bruce Campbell behind the camera).

Late shift workers at small grocery store are first menaced by the jilted boyfriend of cashier Elizabeth Cox, then informed that the store is being closed down at the end of the month, leaving them unemployed. But being out of a job is the least of their worries, as a menacing maniac starts killing them off one by one in a senes of surprisingly gory set pieces.

Spiegel (who used to work at a grocery store) makes great use of the hazardous equipment commonly found at these establishments: the trash compactor, the meat hook, the butcher's table saw. He also peppers the film with a series of increasingly outlandish POV shots that out-do even Raimi's notoriously restless camera—point of view of a shopping cart, a knife, a package of meat as its being shrinkwrapped, and even the inside of a rotary telephone.

Intruder is a fun, fast-paced slasher that is packed with great, ridiculous kills and funny visual gags (including groaners like the "1/2 Off" sign attached to a dismembered corpse). Spiegel takes his time setting up his characters during the first half of the film, but once the murders begin, he kicks things into high gear, this was a film clearly made by people who enjoyed the genre, and had a good time working in it.

The cast does an excellent job as well. "Final Girl" Cox had been in *Night of the Creeps* and *The Wraith*, while co-star Renee Estevez (*The West Wing*) is Charlie Sheen's younger sister. Spiegel cast both Raimi brothers (Sam and Ted) as doomed store employees (Sam Raimi, in fact, recreates his meat hook death scene from the original short film), along with Dan Hicks (Jake, from *Evil Dead II*). He also peppered the film with cute cameos from frequent Three Stooges foil Emil Sitka, *Green Acres* regulars Alvy Moore and Tom Lester, and Bruce Campbell and producer Lawrence Bender as policemen.

Intruder received a lot of coverage in *Fangoria* and *GoreZone* when it was in production, likely because of the links to *Evil Dead II*, and Raimi's presence in the cast (there was even some nice behind the scenes footage shot for the Sam Raimi episode of the UK series *The Incredibly Strange Film Show*, shown in the U.S. on The Discovery Channel in 1990).

While the film was never a hit, it does hold e tremendous amount of historical significance. Special effects gurus Rob Kurtzman, Greg Nicotero, and Howard Berger launched KNB EFX with this film. And it was Spiegel who introduced *Intruder* producer Lawrence Bender to Quentin Tarantino, which led to their first successful collaboration on *Reservoir Dogs*. (Bender went on to produce all of Tarantino's subsequent films.)

Unfortunately, the film got lost in the shuffle as executive producer and distributor Charles Band shut down Empire Pictures and launched Full Moon. *Intruder* wound being released on tape by Paramount in a truncated version that snipped out all of the great gore effects in an effort to obtain an R-rating from the finicky MPAA.

Thankfully, Synapse has restored Spiegel's original cut of the film with all the gore intact, and tossed in some great bonus features. Spiegel and Bender are on hand for a lively commentary track, and both appear (along with Cox, Campbell, Hicks and several other cast members) in a 38-minute making-of featurette. There's also a nice little vignette with filmmaker Vincent Pereira, who describes how he wrote to *GoreZone* about his disappointment in the cut version of *Intruder*, and later received an uncut tape in the mail directly from Spiegel himself.

There's also original cast audition footage, extended murder sequences, a still gallery, two spoiler-filled trailers (under both of the film's titles), and outtakes from Spiegel's now-lost original Super 8 *Night Crew* film, shot in 1979.

The film is presented at 1.78:1, and as is usually the case with Synapse's efforts, the transfer is excellent.

Brian Albright

BROTHER THEODORE
TO MY GREAT CHAGRIN
NOW ON DVD

He is considered to be one of the most significant links in the history of comedy, admired by such people as Eric Bogosian and Woody Allen. His television appearances have spanned from Merv Griffin to Dick Cavett to David Letterman. His long running Off-Broadway show was hailed as "diabolical genius." He is Brother Theodore. A former millionaire playboy in the late 1930's of Germany, Theodore endured the sobering loss of his entire family, his fortune, and his own identity, as a survivor of Dachau concentration camp. Shipped to America, humiliated and stunned, Theodore yearned to reclaim his high-status and wealth. Continually haunted by his loss, and hindered as a displaced foreigner, he tapped "the power of despair" to re-invent himself, capitalizing on his dark, existential humor—to become one of America's most respected humorists and monologists.

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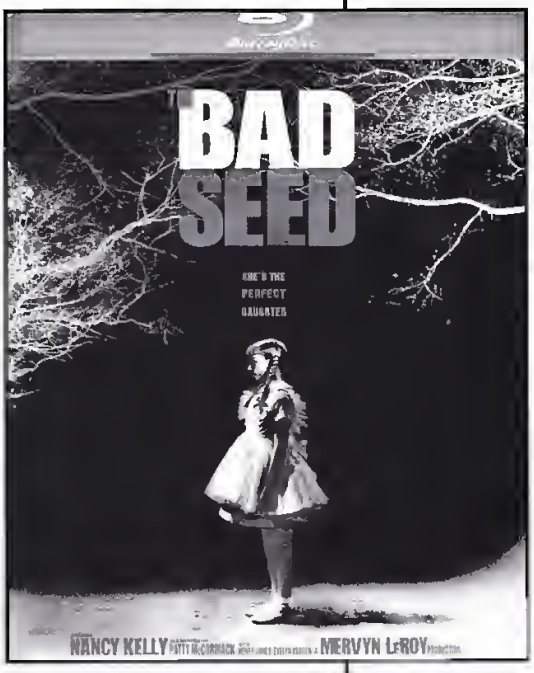
THE BAD SEED
Directed by Mervyn Leroy
(1956) Warner Bros. Blu-ray

At one point during the commentary track for *The Bad Seed*, Patty McCormack and Charles Busch acknowledge the film's dated nature, citing later, more explicit "evil child" movies such as *The Exorcist* (1973) and *The Omen* (1976). It's true that the impact of *The Bad Seed* has faded with time, but there is still enough substance present—along with a certain historical value--to make the film worth watching at least once.

The Bad Seed began as a novel by William March, then achieved success on Broadway in an adaptation by Maxwell Anderson. Warner Brothers purchased the screen rights and Mervyn Leroy—fresh off his work on *Mister Roberts* (1955), another filmed version of a hit play—was set to produce and direct The major players in the cast were mostly imported from the Broadway version: Nancy Kelly, Patty McCormack, Evelyn Varden, Eileen Heckart, and Henry Jones all repeated their stage roles.



Rhoda is the precocious, polite, apparently picture-perfect 8-year-old daughter of military officer Kenneth Pennmark and his wife Christine. Kenneth's various postings have resulted in a peripatetic life for his family, but Rhoda is now enrolled in the private Fern School in a small American town. The Pennmarks live in an apartment, part of a large house sub-divided by the owner, Monica Breedlove,who lives upstairs. Although most people, include her father and Monica, consider Rhoda a well-behaved and well-adjusted child, Christine is aware of her daughter's darker side. After a young boy dies in a tragic accident at a school picnic, Christine puts two and two together and has to face an unpleasant truth about her child.

Other than locally-determined matters of obscenity and such, the stage in the United States has been largely free of censorship (unlike the UK, where the Lord Chamberlain's office vetted stage performances until 1968). Topics taboo in motion pictures—the content of which was ruled by the Production Code until the late 1960s--were regularly broached in plays. *The Bad Seed's* basic premise wasn't specifically forbidden in Hollywood, but the Production Code insisted that criminals be punished, end in the book and play, this didn't happen. Mervyn Leroy and scripter John Lee Mahin came up with an alternative ending, albeit one which is almost literally a *deus ex machina* conclusion.

The concept of a truly bad child was relatively novel for the period. Naughty kids, spoiled kids, bullies, even "troubled" children, sure, but **evil**? Not so much. *These Three* (1936), based on the 1934 play "The Children's Hour," featured a malicious adolescent, but at least she never kills anyone herself (though she drives one of her teacher's to suicide). But an 8-year-old sociopathic murderer? Shirley Temple would never have killed a classmate, that's for sure.

Unlike some of the subsequent "evil children" movies--in addition to the titles mentioned above, one might add *Village of the Damned* (1960), among others—*The Bad Seed* doesn't suggest a supernatural or science-fiction reason for its murderous prodigy. Instead, the idea of a genetic predisposition towards evil is advanced, which leads to a "nature vs. nurture" or "heredity vs. environment" debate (a third alternative--a "one in a million" mutation—is also briefly mentioned). This discussion is quite interesting but it's delivered in a didactic manner typical of a stageplay rather than being teased out subtly, and all of this talk, talk, talk detracts from what the viewer wants to see: malevolent little Rhoda scheming, causing trouble, then lying about it.

A standard goal of film adaptations of plays is to "open up" the original work. On Broadway, the action of *The Bad Seed* unfolded on a single set, the living room of the family's apartment. The movie ventures into various rooms within the apartment, into the basement, the yard, and even the notorious park and wharf which will play an important part in the story. However, the stage origins are still very much in evidence: people enter the scene, say their lines, then depart; then someone else comes in, says their lines, etc. Mervyn Leroy breaks these scenes up into individual shots, varying the camera angles, adding closeups, and so on, but—particularly in the interiors--the length and nature of the sequences and their deviation from standard film form, reveal the film's origins.

Dated premise and stiff execution aside, *The Bad Seed* is curiously helped and harmed by the stagey performances. In her DVD commentary, McCormack says Mervyn Leroy had the imported Broadway actors tone down their emoting, something everyone seems to have taken to heart with the exception of McCormick herself and Eileen Heckart. Heckart, playing the drunk and grieving mother of Rhoda's victim, chews the scenery like a horde of locusts descending on a wheat field—yet in a hilarious, campy way, this works. Maxwell Anderson's pointed dialogue and Heckart's manic delivery make these scenes stand out.

McCormack, on the other hand, is horribly mannered, over-enunciating her lines and conveying absolutely no menace. Only in her scenes with Henry Jones—playing "LeRoy," the simple but devious handyman—is she convincing in the slightest. The other adults seem to accept Rhoda at face value (though her mother has suspicions), but LeRoy, childlike in many ways himself, spars with her as an equal, taunting her until she commits some fatal errors (unfortunately for LeRoy, they're literally fatal for him as well). These delightful scenes make one wish McCormack had been more experienced (or had been directed more skillfully) in the rest of the film. As it stands, her performance is excessively artificial and only sporadically effective. It's an indication of how much acting styles have changed in the time that has elapsed since then that both Heckart and McCormack received Supporting Actress Oscar nominations for outre performances that today elicit laughter.

The DVD commentary also indicates Mervyn Leroy did little to prepare the other actors for their roles, allowing their stage directions to stand unchallenged. If true, this explains why performers like Nancy Kelly (nominated for a Best Actress Oscar) and Norma Varden—although relatively naturalistic in their speech and actions--seem to be operating on a different plane than film veterans Paul Fix, William Hopper, and Jesse White The Broadway show veterans were going through the identical motions they'd done hundreds of times on the stage, only slightly modified for a very different medium.

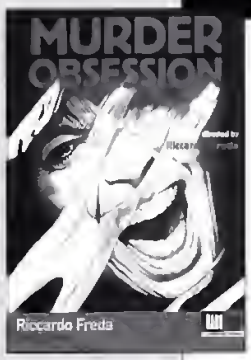
Despite all this, *The Bad Seed* retains a good deal of entertainment value, particularly if one has not seen it before and has avoided reading too much about the plot in advance (which is why I've tried to avoid too many spoilers here). Not really scary or thrilling or suspenseful, *The Bad Seed* is nonetheless a charming, campy time-capsule.

The extras on the Blu-ray version have been ported over from the 2004 DVD release. These include a 15-minute video reminiscence by Patty McCormack, the original trailer, and the aforementioned commentary track. McCormack is accompanied on the latter by Charles Busch, a playwright and actor perhaps best known for his cross-dressing roles. The two have good chemistry and the commentary is mildly entertaining, although if one watches the McCormack video first (as I did), some of her anecdotes are repeated during the commentary. At 129 minutes in length, *The Bad Seed* is a long movie for its time, and the commentary track has its share of dull moments and irrelevant tangents, but it's not the worst I've sat through.

Technically, it seems Warner Brothers has rectified an aspect-ratio error that existed on the 2004 DVD, presenting the film in 1.85.1 widescreen. The video and audio quality are excellent.

David Wilt

MURDER OBSESSION
Directed by Riccardo Freda
(1981) Raro Blu-ray / DVD



Film actor Michael (Stefano Patrizi) has a troubled past. As a young child, he allegedly stabbed his famous music composer father to death after he found him beating his mother Shirley (Martine Brochard). Called back to the family manse by his incestuous, smothering mother and creepy butler (John Richardson), Michael takes some of his movie industry friends (one of whom is none other than Black Emmanuelle herself, Laura Gemser) along as backup. A series of murders by an unseen killer begins to tear through the houseguests. Why? Not to worry, as two totally contradictory and convoluted stories are offered towards the film's end.

Director Riccardo Freda kick-started the Italian horror film genre with *I Vampiri* in 1956, and one can only marvel at the difference a mere 25 years can make. *Murder Obsession* plays as like an unintentional satire on the Italian giallo genre. Patrizi with his blonde hair, blue eyes and diffident manner suggests a male version of the female bimbo. His character seems to evoke the other similar male leads, likewise as limpid and ineffectual in the films of Dario Argento. Most embarrassing is a nightmare suffered by one of the female leads. Her breasts spilling out of her sheer nightgown, our heroine stumbles through an underground grotto and almost trips over a giant stuffed, plush doll spider while skulls affixed to the ceiling, acquired from the remainder table at a Halloween store rain down phony blood. The motivations behind the various killings in the film make no sense whatsoever. An especially telling bit of shoddy business involves a decapitation with a chainsaw—when the whirring blades touches the screaming actress' throat, her flesh gives ewey like chips of pottery.

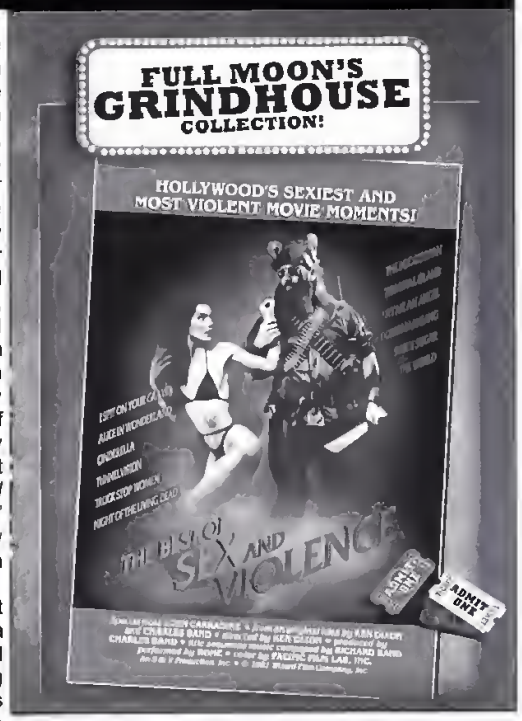
The French-Italian production is an abject mess from the get-go: bad acting, terrible special effects and nonsensical story. Especially disappointing is that Freda, in his next-to-last film (he was fired and was not credited for his work on *La fille de d'Artagnan* in 1994 before passing away at the age of 90 in 1999) fills the film with truly bad camera movements. Ragged pans and indifferent compositions make this especially tough going for the less patient viewer.

To his credit, Freda ends *Murder Obsession* with an inspired, blasphemous image that shows a great deal of verve. The final shot is an especially grotesque parody of a famous work of Renaissance art, which underscores the unnatural relationship between the hero and his wicked mother. A conceit worthy of Luis Bunuel, Alejandro Jodorowsky slipped in a similar visual homage at the beginning of *The Holy Mountain* (1973).

As if to sweep this very minor effort under the rug, Raro Video, a label known for preserving and promoting Italian films with countless supplements such as interviews, critical comments and profusely illustrated booklets with their DVDs, only includes a single extra on this disc. A talking head interview with special effects maestro Sergio Stivalletti, conducted without a single edit, touches upon his embarrassing experiences with director Freda. Unfortunate, as Raro has released some very important films with Criterion-level packaging as of late—get back on the bus, gang!

Greg Goodsell

THE BEST OF SEX AND VIOLENCE
Directed by Ken Dixon
Full Moon DVD



While there has been quibbling in the video world over the use of the term "Grindhouse" ever since the 2007 release of the Robert Rodriguez/Quentin Tarantino double feature of that name, Charles Band's Full Moon Pictures has now released ten individual DVDs as their own "Grindhouse Collection." Most of the titles amassed herein were actually created for direct-to-video release (under the Wizard label) in the 1980s, but several of them actually qualify for the title (I, myself, saw both *Savage Island* and *Necropolis* on the big screen in San Francisco). And while subsequent Ken Dixon compilations such as *Filmgore* (hosted by Elvira) and *Zombieathon* actually consisted of condensed "highlight reels" of the films they showcased and went straight to VHS, his first such compendium, *The Best of Sex and Violence*, stuck with the pure "trailer" experience and even managed to land a few theatrical playdates as a midnight movie upon its creation.

The show gets off to a rather inconsistent start—we lead off with *Bury Me An Angel* (a perfect representative of the umbrella title) and go straight from there to *The Doberman Gang* (a family-friendly PG release!). But once this entertaining anomaly is disposed of, the collection hits its stride, offering up representative slices of just about everything sought out by the true grindhouse patrons of the 70s: the pseudo-Biblical *The Sin of Adam and Eve* (hey, they were naked in the source material, so nobody gets to complain—get it?); sweet-natured X-rated musical fairy tale romps such as Bill Osco's *Alice in Wonderland* and the Band factory's own *Cinderella* (starring the late, lamented Cheryl "Rainbeaux" Smith); and exotic softcore as represented by the ubiquitous Laura Gemser (*Emanuelle Around The World*) and a pre-Vanity D.D. Winters (I don't suppose anyone remembers that Rob Bottin himself created the ape-man suit for *Tanya's Island,* but it, too, can be seen here). There's time out for the unrated shocks of such Jerry Gross releases as *I Spit on Your Grave* and *Zombie* as well as the Euro-sleaze classic *The Devil's Wedding Night*; there are the obligatory women's prison films (*Terminal Island, Sweet Sugar*), and we wrap up with three outrageously-narrated Rudy Ray Moore trailers (the *Dolemite* films and *Avenging Disco Godfather*).

Hosting the hodgepodge from beginning to end on a threadbare set is a resigned John Carradine, reciting remarks actually penned by Band-house writer Frank Ray Perelli (whose first filmed screenplay was *The Doberman Gang*, so that answers *that* question!). Carradine is supposed to come off as amusingly lecherous and self-deprecating ("If I had saved my money, I wouldn't be doing this!") and he makes various allusions to some of the superior films in his 500-title career, but he's clearly less than enthused with the project... and I'm still not sure whether or not it was meant as a deliberate joke when he claimed to know "nothing" about the horror films in one batch of trailers—including Ulli Lommel's *The Boogey Man* in which he actually appeared (was Peretti even aware of this?). His spirits *do* seem somewhat raised when sons David and Keith show up to keep him company at the tail end, artificial though their banter may be.

In addition to a general introduction by Charles Band (which appears on all ten releases without variation), *The Best of Sex and Violence* is preceded on DVD by a warning/confession that the materials are derived from aged and imperfect sources, so one shouldn't hope for state-of-the-art quality. And while actual theatrical prints of this item did exist at one point, the DVD presentation looks exactly like a bootleg of a 30-year-old VHS tape (the image of which was annoyingly over-cropped to begin with). Still, the price (approximately $20.00) is right, and those nostalgic for either the trailers themselves or the old Wizard "big box" experience will find themselves well-served. Other titles in the Full Moon Grindhouse collection include *Auditions*, *Dreamaniac*, *Mutant Hunt*, *White Slave* and Dixon's *Famous T & A* (hosted by Sybil Danning).

Shane M. Dallmann

CANNIBAL HOLOCAUST

Directed by Ruggero Deodato
(1980) Shameless Screen Entertainment
Region free Blu-ray

In 2011 Italian director Ruggero Deodato was presented with the prestigious Cine Excess Lifetime Achievement Award, previously given to such luminaries as Roger Corman, Dario Argento and Joe Dante. After years of his name being associated with *Cannibal Holocaust* alone, it gave him an opportunity to reflect on a prolific career which began in the late 1950s. But no matter what else he has done, it is *Cannibal Holocaust* on which, for better or worse, his reputation rests, and on its initial release it caused shockwaves around the world.

It is not difficult to see why. The film was made using real Amazonian tribes, including some that still practised cannibalism. There are scenes of un-simulated animal slaughter that have generated accusations of cruelty and sadistic exploitation. Unknown to Deodato, his lead actor Robert Kerman had starred in dozens of American porn films. The rumor still persists that two of the lead actors had sex in front of real frightened natives, and there is documentary footage used of actual executions (some of this footage can be seen in the equally infamous shock-doc *Faces of Death (1978)*).

Cannibal Holocaust tells two stories; the first depicts Robert Kerman as anthropologist Professor Harold Monroe as he heads into the Amazon jungle, and into the very heart of darkness. An award-winning documentary film crew have gone missing and they were last seen setting off to make a film about cannibals. Once Monroe finds their cans of footage he takes it all back to New York where a TV channel are desperate to put the film out on prime-time. The film then switches to this original footage, and we see the horrific lengths the filmmakers went to in order to capture shocking imagery, such as forcing dozens of tribes people into a hut and then burning it down. Growing sick of their behaviour, the cannibals enact a grisly revenge on the sadistic white intruders, and it is all captured on camera. *Cannibal Holocaust* serves to constantly wrong-foot the audience. This documentary footage looks real, complete with film damage. One is drawn into an unfolding horrific narrative that plays with the very concept of reality until the audience is dazed and beaten to a pulp. It is the filmmaking equivalent of Russell Crowe's bloodstained gladiator screaming "Are you not entertained?" to the baying crowds in an arena littered with corpses. The only possible reaction is stunned silence.

Deodato uses the language of exploitation and mondo cinema here to confront and accuse both his audience and the media. He had already contributed to the cannibal cycle with *Last Cannibal World* (1976), and was at first reluctant to revisit it. With encouragement from financiers who clearly felt there was still mileage in cannibalism, he finally agreed, only this time he would produce a film which highlighted the hypocrisy of those involved, with a cynicism towards filmmaking which was ahead of his time. He has claimed that his initial inspiration for the film came from seeing real-life footage of atrocities on the evening news. Regularly his children were exposed to images of mutilated bodies and terrorist bombings, and he began to wonder why it was necessary, and just how much of this reportage could be trusted. As a recent news story regarding fabrication and staging of events in a BBC documentary scenes about an Amazonian tribe demonstrates, Deodato was right to ask questions.

This was one of the first movies to use "found footage" to tell a story, something which continues to be popular at the box office, with films like *Cloverfield* (2008), *Paranormal Activity* (2007) and *The Last Exorcism* (2010) all taking millions of dollars. For audiences in 1980 however this was a new cinematic tool and seemed incredibly real, particularly because Deodato had his actors genuinely kill animals in order to blur the boundaries between reality and make-believe. To further the illusion that the film crew had actually been killed by the natives the actors were contractually required to disappear for a year after the movie was released. This deception was subsequently aborted when Deodato was charged with murder in Italy and had to prove that they were all still alive. Bizarrely, Deodato was required to recreate in the courtroom the infamous special effect of a girl impaled on a pole because the judge refused to believe they had not done it for real.

Cannibal Holocaust has had a varied distribution history, locking horns with censorship boards and moral crusaders around the world for over thirty years. Surely there has not been a trashier, ire-inducing film title in the history of cinema. Although Deodato claims to have been surprised by the furore, it is hard to believe that he wouldn't know that using the words "cannibal" and "holocaust" together were going to e upset a lot of people, regardless of the film's content. Despite the controversy the film became a global commercial success, with claims that it has grossed over $200 million to date. In Tokyo in 1982 the only film to make more at the box office than *Cannibal Holocaust* was *E.T.*

There have been many different versions of *Cannibal Holocaust* released over the ensuing three decades with varying levels of picture and sound quality. Most releases have been cut, with some having up to five minutes missing, although the film has been available in its entirety in the US. In this release, due to the censorship rules in the UK regarding animal cruelty, the film is cut by fifteen seconds to remove some detail of a muskrat being impaled on a knife. All other required cuts from previous releases have been waived. Deodato, who has always expressed his regret and distaste at the animal killing, has also created a new edit. Essentially he has made slight cuts and added film damage to obscure the most unpleasant shots, which actually add to the impression that this is genuine found footage. A short video introduction to the new edit by Deodato explains why he has decided to make these changes. Even die-hard fans of *Cannibal Holocaust* will admit that the most problematic moments in the film are those where real animals are being butchered. Those who insist in seeing the full film with all of its horror are still able to (minus the aforementioned fifteen seconds).

Whereas previous releases of *Cannibal Holocaust* have often visually resembled the VHS quality in which most of us first saw it, in HD the experience is like seeing the movie for the first time. The cinematography depicts both the awe-inspiring glory and gripping claustrophobia of the Amazon, and the counterpoint of Ortolani's romantic score is both disorienting and moving. The film has never looked or sounded better. Thankfully this visual upgrade has not cleaned up the documentary footage to the point where it no longer looks real.

Shameless Screen Entertainment have created a new package of extras for this release. The main item is an assessment of the film from an academic and critical perspective. *Cannibal Holocaust* is debated and discussed by experts and professors who put the film into context and give praise where it is due without shying away from some of the more controversial aspects. Writer and historian Kim Newman is not afraid to admit that he does not particularly like the film, yet he still has plenty to say. Also included are new interviews with Ruggero Deodato and Carl Gabriel Yorke, who played one of the members of the documentary crew. Although some of these stories have been heard before, the anecdotes they share are still fascinating and slightly disturbing. Yorke is able to laugh about it at now, but there were times on location where he was afraid he was actually going to die. As well as trailers for forthcoming Shameless Screen Entertainment releases *The House at the Edge of the Park* (1980), *Don't Torture a Duckling* (1972) and *The New York Ripper* (1982), the full Shameless Trailer Park is included, featuring trailers for thirty previous releases. Where else will you find such oddities as *Retmen* (1988), *Bebe Yage* (1973), *The Bronx Warriors* (1982) and *Love Goddess of the Cannibals* (1978)? Shameless seem to specialise almost exclusively in Italian exploitation, and these trailers demonstrate why they have become such a must-have label. There are probably films they have released that you have never heard of, but you will want to collect them all.

Shameless Screen Entertainment have gone the extra mile with their packaging as well. The traditional blue case is replaced with a bright yellow amaray and the jacket features reversible artwork. You can choose the original UK VHS image, a garish painting of a native chewing on some intestines, or a newly commissioned more subtle image which only hints at the horrors that lurk within. The box comes with a warning courtesy of the British film censors, that the film "Contains strong sex, sexual violence, bloody violence and animal slaughter". Whilst this may be true, the statement fails to put the ugly truth of *Cannibal Holocaust* into context—that Deodato questions the motives of his fellow filmmakers who have used the suffering and barbarity of others for their own acclaim, and the audience whose insatiable appetite for graphic images merely encourages them.

Adrian Smith

KILLER PARTY
Director: William Fruet
(1986) Warner Archive

This surprisingly fun Canadian slasher flick kicks off with what may be the longest "cheat" opening in history. After a particularly chipper pastor tops off a funeral with a quote from the *Wizard of Oz*, the bitchy daughter-in-law of a deceased old woman finds herself pulled into the coffin and sent to the crematorium. But this is not the film we're here to watch. It's just a move being played at a 1950s-themed drive-in attended by 1980s teenagers. An abandoned concession stand and zombie attack turn out to be yet *another* diversion; they're actually part of a heavy metal music video for the unfortunately named band White Sister (singing a song called "April Fool," the film's original title). The video is on a TV being watched by Phoebe (Elaine Wilkes), a sorority pledge who thankfully leads us into the actual film nearly 15 minutes after the opening credits.

Phoebe, Jennifer (Joanna Johnson) and Vivia (Sherry Willis-Burch) are pledging a sorority lorded over by the bitchy Veronica (Alicia Fleer). Part of their initiation takes place in an abandoned fraternity house that's stood vacant since a pledge was accidentally decapitated during a hazing ritual. After Vivia turns the tables and scares the sorority girls with e prop guillotine, she and her friends are asked to pull the same haunted house prank during the ennual April Fool's masquerade dance as payback for the frat boys who had, earlier in the film, unleashed a jar full of bees during the sorority's naked hot tub frolic.

In the meantime, someone is slowly doing away with minor characters (including stuffy literature professor Paul Bartel), and once we get to the titular Killer Party, that someone has decked themselves out in a deep sea diver costume, complete with a lethal trident that they use to wipe out almost the entire cast.

You've seen all of this before: the sorority hazings, the nerd comedy, the costume party, the is-it-murder-or-is-it-a-gag April Fool's pranks, but director William Fruet takes a light touch. And although the laughs land more frequently than the scares in this horror comedy (the gore is extremely discrete, as the Warner Archive DVD is the cut version of the film), by the time *Killer Party* switches gears and turns into a possession flick, most viewers will be willing to go right along for the ride.

That gear switching does lead to a few tonal stumbles. After the overlong intro, the film doesn't seem to be quite sure what kind of horror/comedy it is, exactly. Bartel plays things broadly, like he thought he was in a more obvious spoof like *Pandemonium* (1982); other bits seem to belong in a sub-*Porky's* jiggle film, and still others take a more absurdist approach ("I gargle with musk!").

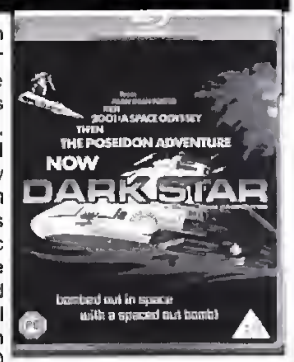
It's not as good as the films it borrows from (notably *Hell Night* and *Terror Train*), but *Killer Party* is still a good time for slasher fans looking for something a little bit different.

Director Fruet also gave us *Death Weekend* (1976), *Funeral Home* (1980), and *Blue Monkey* (1987), while screenwriter Barney Cohen had previously penned one of the better Jason Voorhees outings, *Friday the 13th: The Final Chapter* (1984). Joanna Johnson went on to a lengthy stint on *The Bold and the Beautiful*. She eventually developed the sitcom *Hope and Faith*, based directly on her soap opera experiences. The *Killer Party* soundtrack includes cuts from KC & The Sunshine Band and Laura Branigan.

Warner Archive has released *Killer Party* as a bare-bones, on-demand disc. The picture quality is a little soft here and there, but otherwise adequate.

Brian Albright

DARK STAR
Directed by John Carpenter
(1974) Fabulous Film Blu-ray (region free import)
VCI Entertainment (DVD domestic)



On the slummy, cramped Dark Star—a woebegone spacecraft on a mission to clear away unstable planets in order to make way for further Earth exploration—a crew of four astronauts bicker and while away the interminable hours. Lieutenant Doolittle (Brian Narelle) is the de facto leader, and like his name implies, he can only do little, but can't talk to the animals that are his fellow astronauts. Boiler (Cal Kuniholm) is the no-nonsense man of action who regards his fellow employees with scorn; the neurotic, irritating Sergeant Pinback (Dan O'Bannon) who may or may not who he says he is; and then there is Talby (Dre Pahich) who has removed himself form the ship dynamic altogether by retreating to the observation deck to stare into the cosmos. They are lovably scolded by their motherly female-voiced computer (Cookie Knapp) and the speaking bombs they detonate all have distinct human personalities. Bomb #19 (Alan Sheretz) has an outgoing manner, all too cheerful to detonate on cue. Bomb #20 (Adam Beckenbaugh), however, is rather prissy—some have likened him to Franklin Pangborne—and difficult. There is also the body of Commander Powell (Joe Saunders) who is kept cryogenically frozen below deck, who is revived at the time of crisis. There is also the precocious beach ball-like alien that prowls the air shafts . . .

To err is human, and the Dark Star crew is all too human. One comic mishap leads to another and petulant Bomb #20 detonates against clear directives. Lieutenant Doolittle and Talby bid their adieus floating into space, and the film ends with everyone dying, the audience left with a wistful smile on their faces.

A direct reply to the existential questions posed by Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1969), *Dark Ster* stares into the infinite cosmos with a yawn, a slap, a tickle, a guffaw and a goggle-eyed stare that has more than just a suggestion of hope and redemption along the eyelids. The astronauts in this film are surrounded by the limitless universe and in lieu of respectful awe pursue petty grudges, tell stale jokes and shrug off responsibility. For better or worse, this is the human condition reducto ad absurdum, with emotion and feeling ruling over logic. The machinery on the ill-fated mission take a cue from their human hosts in the manner of children imitating the worst behavior of their parents, sending everything to kingdom come in the process. Everything is brought to a satisfactory close by Lt. Doolittle's dogged determination to make the best of a bad situation.

As the jam packed, definitive two-disc *Dark Star: The Hyper-Drive Edition* points out, this film was essentially borne out of petty jealousy. It all began when the student short film *The Resurrection of Bronco Billy* scooped up the Academy Award as Best Student Film in 1970, a youthful and headstrong college student by the name of John Carpenter was upstaged at the awards ceremony. He plowed all his resources and drafted all of his friends and family to help with the production of *Dark Star*, and the result after five years and very little money was a genuine science-fiction classic.

The film by itself is more than enough, but this special edition is packed with extras. On disc one, there is an interview with sci-fi author Alan Dean Foster, who penned the film's novelization. Foster says that it was highly challenging in writing a full-length book on what essentially is a meditation on existential ennui. (Foster also shares some autobiographical information about living in Hollywood, such as the time he stumbled upon Julie "Catwoman" Newmar sleeping on a friend's couch!) There is also an audio commentary by "super-fan" Andrew Gilchrist, a heartfelt and earnest chat voiced in Gilchrist's quavering British accent. Snobby purists will note that when he says that *Dark Star* is essentially the play "Waiting for Godot" in outer space, that he rhymes "Godot" with "audit!" Among the wealth of extras is an interview with male lead Brian Narelle (whose only real acting credit, discounting video games and TV shorts was *Dark Star*), there is the computer animated 3D Guide to the *Dark Star* ship with some clever in-jokes; a written intro by Dan O'Bannon, coupled with some trivia—for example, the ending of the film is obviously lifted from Ray Bradbury's short story "Kaleidoscope." Rounding out the extras is the film's original trailer, and, BOTH versions of the film—the theatrical version and director Carpenter's 98-minute cut.

VCI's 2nd disc (contains the exhaustive 97-minute documentary "Let There Be Light: The Odyssey of "*Dark Star*," (also included on the Blu-ray import) which features interviews all surviving cast and crew members, and most importantly details the valuable input from Jack H. (*The Blob*, 1958) Harris had on the finished product. Harris explains how he was drawn to the film by his love of science-fiction and how the original film contained extended long shots of the crew members snoring! It was Harris that goosed the production along with the extended cliffhanging sequence in the elevator shaft. It's revealed that Harris added a lot of production value to what was an essentially a student film five years after the fact.

The documentary also details the film's somewhat disastrous theatrical release, geared as a straight-up sci-fi adventure in lieu of an absurdist comedy. It didn't help that the film was distributed by Bryanstone Pictures, the Mafioso-minded folks who foisted such game-changing features as *Deep Throat* (1972) and *The Texas Chainsaw Massecre* (1974) on the American public. The money earned by *Dark Star* and these other films, given the nature of the people involved, probably involved busted kneecaps and bodies tossed into the bay.

In short, *Dark Ster* was the product of headstrong young men bound and determined to get their offbeat version onto the screen. Carpenter and O'Bannon would reap the benefits of their efforts with far more commercial features down the road, but none of those films would send their audiences out the door with such a quirky mixture of comedy and pathos.

The Blu-ray from Fabulous Films is missing many of the extras that are featured on the VCI DVD (audio commentary, several interviews, trivia, etc.). The minimal at best HD upgrade is worth a look, but if you already own the Hyperdrive edition from VCI, then don't bother with the Blu-ray—the import high definition disc is a disappointment.

Greg Goodsell

THE DEVIL'S MEN aka LAND OF THE MINOTAUR (1976)
Directed by Kostas Karagiannis
TERROR (1978)
Directed by Norman J. Warren
Scorpion Releasing DVD

This U.K. double bill from Scorpion Releasing is hosted by British babe Katarina Leigh Waters and features two very middling works from the 1970s. The primary attraction is *The Devil's Men* (1976), which boasts two horror greats in its cast, but even that can only accomplish so much. Shot in Greece, the film finds Luan Peters traveling to a small village to meet her boyfriend, who has suddenly gone missing. She enlists the help of local priest Donald Pleasence in finding him, and Pleasence in turn sends for New York P.I. Costa Skouras (he doesn't sound too Greek, does he?). The village is entirely populated by pagan cultists who sacrifice couples (yes, *couples only*) to their Minotaur deity, and resident exiled baron Peter Cushing is running the whole show.

Casting Cushing and Pleasence together again must have sounded like a great idea at the time (actually, it still does), and the isolation of the protagonists in a remote location where they are cut off from the outside and facing the equivalent of a throng of malicious Greek hillbillies should also have been a huge plus. With all of that going for it, how could it go wrong? Well . . .

The first obstacle comes as early as the title; the film was released on these shores as *Land of the Minotaur*, but whether you know it by that name or *The Devil's Men*, neither gets things off to a good start. *Land of the Minotaur* sounds like someone thought to revive the peplum genre; basically, it is misleading and might leave some viewers feeling as though they've been conned. *The Devil's Men* is more descriptive, perhaps, but that is largely due to its screaming mediocrity. In other words, the title is as drab and unimaginative as the film itself. It's pretty bad when a motion picture reaches its first stumbling block at the title.

So, what do we have then? The pairing of Cushing and Pleasence is at least good for curious horror fans. Peter Cushing was one of those rare talents who could lift *any* enterprise. Donald Pleasence was an excellent actor, but with all respect, a bland film with Donald Pleasence was still just a bland film; a bland film with Peter Cushing, on the other hand, was first and foremost a Peter Cushing film. It may have been a sub par Peter Cushing film, but his presence alone was enough to elevate it beyond what it would otherwise be worth. At the very least, *The Devil's Men* has that much going for it.

Having said that, it needs to be added that *The Devil's Men* is most surely a very sub par Peter Cushing film. What does stand out about it is the fact that, for all his many appearances in genre films, this is one of Cushing's only truly sinister roles; in fact, it may be his single most evil turn. But if you were to take Cushing and Pleasence out of the picture, you would be left with nothing but the feminine charms of Luan Peters, and as fetching as she is, she is still not capable of carrying that weight. And as for that supposedly American P.I., well, the less said about him the better.

The second feature, *Terror* (1978), is a fairly routine body count picture with a supernatural bent. The spirit of a witch burned at the stake comes back to murder the descendents of the family that put her to death (we've seen this scenario a zillion times before). *Terror* plays largely like a bush league Pete Walker knockoff, which is hardly surprising since it was written by David McGillivray, who was the screenwriter on Walker's *House of Whipcord* (1974) and *Schizo* (1976). Otherwise, director Norman J. Warren also confesses to having been heavily influenced by Argento's *Suspiria* (1977), which rounds out the film's excessively derivative nature. The most interesting thing on the disc is a 40-minute featurette on the making of *Terror*, though they needn't have spent quite so much time documenting such a forgettable work (20 minutes would have sufficed). I mean, it's not like *Terror* could boast of a cast that included Peter Cushing and Donald Pleasence.

BCI Entertainment released this same double bill in their Crypt of Terror DVD series, but opted to use *The Devil's Men* under the alternate title *Land of the Minotaur*.

Bryan L. Yeatter

EL MONSTRO DEL MAR!
Directed by Stuart Simpson
(2010) Vicious Circle Films DVD

Do filmmakers have a target audience in mind when they make their movies? Of course there are films which are intended to attract "everyone," but as budget and aspirations drop, films are increasingly aimed at a certain demographic: there are chick flicks, children's movies, action films, art films, teen comedies. All sorts of niche markets appear, with movies specifically aimed at African-Americans, Christians, Latinos, nerds and/or geeks, and so on.

Try as I might, I have been unable to visualize the perfect audience for the Australian-made *El Monstro del Mar!* Ironic hipsters? Even the *faux*-Spanish title is just too, too ironically twee—"look how self-aware and self-indulgent we are!" Although sometimes described as an *homage* to Russ Meyer and '50s monster movies, those elements don't mesh effectively under the excessively mannered direction of Stuart Simpson. This one's got retro-style music, tough young women, graphic gore, frenetic cutting, sardonic humor, over-acting, tattoos. But it's also got a plot as thin as tissue paper, stretched over 75 very long minutes. One could consider this a triumph of style over substance, though "triumph" is almost certainly too strong a word.

Three young women--Beretta, Blondie, and Snowball--savagely murder two yobbos and take their Cadillac to replace their own dysfunctional auto. They stop at a friend's beach house (hiding out from some vaguely specified earlier crime, seen in a flashback sequence). The women's presence—especially their frolicking in the surf, their drinking, and their loud music--disturbs their grumpy, grizzled neighbor, wheelchair-bound Joseph. His teenage granddaughter, innocent Hannah, spends a drunken evening with the tattooed trio of treecherous tarts, but all of that partying has done it: the monster has awakened!

What monster? Oh, the multi-tentacled sea monster that killed everyone in the town (including Hannah's parents) a few years back, and that's recently started in on sport fishermen and . . . female criminals. The final confrontation between Beretta and her gal pals (now including Hannah) is actually quite exciting and effective, but this just reinforces the inconsistent, fragmentary nature of *El Monstro del Mar!*—this sequence would have been a decent climax to a "serious" monster flick, but Simpson makes little or no attempt at such a thing. He's not making a cheap science-fiction film, he's paying ironic tribute to the genre, if you're hip enough to understand and enjoy that.

So, what we have is two or three brief monster attacks, a bit of build-up, then the big finish, each separated by long scenes, many belonging to the "other" *homage*, to Russ Meyer's *Faster, Pussycat!, Kill, Kill!* The black & white opening sequence (which explodes into color when a man's throat is cut), the three tough female protagonists (Beretta = Varla, Snowball plays the Rosie role, Blondie is Billie), a bitter old man in a wheelchair, melodramatic dialogue, striking visuals: yep, Simpson's a Meyer fan alright. The problem is, Russ Meyer never made a monster movie, but if he had, it probably would have been a little more stylistically and narratively consistent than this one.

El Monstro del Mar! is a small-scale film, which is not necessarily a pejorative evaluation. It doesn't look rushed or shoddy, it's simply narrowly focused. A few people pop up briefly and are ripped apart by the monster, but the focus is mainly on Beretta, Snowball, Blondie, Hannah, and her grandfather, isolated—if not stranded--on the beach. This evokes not only *Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!*, but classic '50s monster movies like *The Giant Shrews*. Unfortunately, the first two-thirds of the film is mostly monster-free, leaving plenty of time for long sequences of dancing, drinking, bloody flashbacks, and awkward conversation.

On a technical and visual level, *El Monstro del Mar!* leaves little to be desired. The production values are sparse but the film doesn't look cheap, with especially nice cinematography in spots. The monster has lots of tentacles with a snappy mouth on each tip, a big starey eye, and one main, giant, toothy-vagina mouth. Some CGI and some mechanical effects are used to portray the creature, and both methods deliver satisfactory results. The gore makeup and effects are also slick and professional.

Stuart Simpson has a knack for arresting images, and he gets strong performances out of at least three performers--Nelli Scarlet (Beretta), Norman Yemm (Joseph), and Kyrie Capn (Hannah)—but he seems to have had little interest in making his two disparate "tributes" into a cohesive whole. The "parts" of *El Monstro del Mer!* aren't bad, but the "whole" is less than their sum.

David Wilt

NO BLADE OF GRASS

Directed by Cornel Wilde (1970) Warner Archives DVD-R

In the far-flung world of the late seventies, a mysterious virus is wiping out all plant life, which puts a big crimp in the food supply. John Custance (Nigel Davenport) takes up his brother's offer to hightail it with his family to rural northern England in order to wait out the storm at his well-stocked, fortified compound. Gathering up his wife Ann (Jean Wallace, director Cornel Wilde's wife—bad sign!) and daughter Mary (Lynn Frederick), Custance makes it out of London just as the first food riots start to break out. Setting off in two cars, they must first battle their way through street riots. Making a pit stop to pick up arms and ammunition, Custance appeals to an elderly shopkeeper to sell to them. When the old man refuses, he is shot dead by his youthful assistant Pirrie (Anthony May). With his former boss out of the picture, Pirrie joins the family on the trek to Northern England. Convincing Custance to allow him and his sletternly girlfriend (Wendy Richard) to join them, they hit the road once more. With civilization crumbling all around them, things only go from bad to much, much worse. Rape, starvation and the sudden introduction of more survivors (and more mouths to feed) puts a damper on the family's trip. Eventually, even after being robbed of their cars and making the way on foot, our "heroes" (audience sympathies may have gone flying out of the window long before this point) finally reach their destination. For what purpose, it's unclear . . .

No Blade of Grass is a seldom-seen doomsday drama that may now be seen by wider audience thanks to Warner Archives. The film has many egregious flaws, most notably that is feels very dated when seeing it forty years later from when it was originally lensed, yet it still feels strangely cogent. Top on the list is the acting of Jean Wallace, who director Wilde tried unsuccessfully to turn into a movie star. The most patient viewer will wait in vain for Wallace to be among the first casualties in the doomed expedition. For a film set in the late seventies, the fashions worn by the characters are a bit too "Carnaby Street." It's rather comic that all the female characters must make their arduous hike through the deteriorating countryside in cheap vinyl go-go boots. More importantly, while the premise of the film involves a virus killing off all plant life, in spite of some hasty set dressing with dead animals littering the foreground (the end credits state that no animals were harmed or killed in the production), there's no getting around the fact that the British countryside is a vibrant springtime green!

Director and actor Wilde, perhaps best known for his jungle survival pic *The Naked Prey* (1962), made some interesting choices for helming this sci-fi epic. Most curious is his use of "flash-forwards," tinted red, that foretell of terrible things yet to come to the characters. Was he confident that audiences, learning that survival was futile for some, would still be engrossed to watch what happens next? The film feels unsubtle and forced, filled to the brim with countless "grab shots" of man abusing his environment.

That said, *No Blade of Grass* is by far the bleakest cinematic depiction of an apocalypse, EVER (the 1984 BBC nuclear war film *Threads* included). Cornel Wilde may have been attempting to warn the public about the dangers of pollution, but he delivered a sobering reminder on the fragility of civilization instead. Frequently cited as being the British equivalent of *Panic In Year Zero* (1962), where Ray Milland's character hid his mounting hysteria under a mask of steely resolve in order to protect his family after a nuclear attack, *No Blade's* Davenport and company have no compunction whatsoever about killing whoever gets in their way. The killings are performed with such unquestioned nonchalance—the viewer wonders if the filmmakers actually support and condone brute force.

Humans stripped of their humanity are ugly beings indeed. Alliances change within a moment's notice, and while all the survivors huddle together in an attempt to reach their shared goal, there's little question they would kill the most defenseless for a ham sandwich. *No Blade of Grass* is a stark reminder that chaos and anarchy lurks behind every power failure in any urban center, and that the forces of law and order can only do so much.

Global warming aside, the film is still very much relevant today. The plight of the survivors in *No Blade is Grass*, although fictional, is a horrifying reality in eastern Africa. There, tribesmen fleeing repression, drought and starvation trek across the desert with the promise of shelter in faraway places as the armies of tyrant's fire upon unarmed civilians. The fact that this fate is being meted out on once-cocky white Europeans speaks a cruel, ironic justice. Famine is very much a problem in the world today, not due to mysterious plagues, but rather on account of evil men.

Greg Goodsell

CASTLE OF THE LIVING DEAD

Aka *Le Chateau des Morts Vivants*

Directed by Warren Kiefer (1964) Artus DVD (French import, PAL)

"Beware the castle of the living dead . . . Some will live and some will die—before tomorrow's sun is high!" These prophetic words, spoken by a hunchbacked old crone, do little to deter a traveling theatrical troupe from keeping their appointed (and highly profitable) private gig with the wealthy Count Drago (Christopher Lee, currently enjoying the height of his Hammer Films fame). Perhaps the players would have paid more attention had they known that the hag in question was played by none other than Donald Sutherland in one of his two roles therein (surely inspiring one of the best "early works" movie trivia questions ever)? The trivia associated with this film by no means ends here . . . Sutherland's son, born less than two years after *Castle's* release, was, indeed, named for director Warren Kiefer (despite conflicting on-line information, Kiefer was an American director here spearheading a project shot in Italy). Serving as co-writer and second unit director was the legendary Michael Reeves on the first lap of his short but furious career (which, of course, ended shockingly and abruptly following the release of *Witchfinder General*, aka *The Conqueror Worm*). And yes, producer Paul Maslansky is the same Paul Maslansky who would eventually grace us with *Police Academy* . . .

Castle itself sets up plenty of trouble for its troupers before they even reach the title dwelling: their act (highlighting a staged hanging) is compromised by a violent quarrel over money which causes one of their number (well-known character actor Luciano Pigozzi, also known as "Alan Collins") to split from the band, vengeance duly foreswom. And the utter lack of life around the castle—heralded by a motionless raven far too realistic to be a mere prop—is eventually revealed as the handiwork of the Count himself. Obsessed by youth and beauty, Drago has perfected a formula which will preserve it permanently (but, of course, fatally), and he's looking forward to fleshing out his macabre collection courtesy of the visiting entertainers—especially Gaia Germani as the lovely Laura. Nominal hero/love interest Eric (Philippe Leroy) actually has very little to do but look handsome and behave reassuringly: the lion's share of the action actually belongs to dwarf actor Ennio Antonelli, who fearlessly takes on Drago's brutish henchman Sandro (Mirko Valentin) himself in the name of protecting his friends and fellow performers. And while this is by no means a gory film, there's one startlingly violent highlight that takes place in the twinkling of an eye . . .

The post-Napoleonic French setting notwithstanding (Sutherland's other role is that of a hopelessly gullible young soldier), *Castle* takes full advantage of its Italian locations, most memorably the famous "Monster Park" of Bomarzo, the fantastic and foreboding statuary of which serves as a backdrop for both the opening title sequence and a climactic chese through the grounds of Drago's castle. The black-and-white photography of Aldo Tonti infuses the striking visuals with an appropriately funereal atmosphere throughout, accompanied by an appropriate score courtesy of the prolific Angelo Francesco Lavanino.

Castle of the Living Dead has been a public-domain title in the United States for decades, with previous video incarnations suffering for that very circumstance. As the film was never given an American theatrical release, early tape traders made do with the cropped—though uncut—AIP television print), while subsequent renditions on cable television and import video always scored complaints regarding framing issues, missing footage, etc. However, the new French DVD (from Artus) seems to have gotten everything right for once—one can tell from the beginning that the opening titles fit comfortably on the screen, and we're given a choice of both the Italian and English soundtracks. Neither one is "definitive" as the film was, of course, looped in post-production, but Lee provided his own voice for the English version, as did Sutherland (but only for his role as the soldier). The two recordings reportedly vary significantly in terms of actual dialogue, but the only subtitle options come in the form of French translations for both versions. Neither is there an English-language option for the 45m supplemental documentary narrated by Alain Petit, which is unfortunate for Stateside viewers not fluent in French. Still, "the play's the thing," and this is the best release yet of this fascinating and entertaining title.

Editor's note: Odeon Entertainment recently released Castle of the Living Dead *in the U.K. on DVD (region 2 PAL). The picture quality is exact to the Artus edition, although it lacks the extras that are featured on the French DVD.*

Shane M. Dallmann

I SAW THE DEVIL

Directed by Kim Ji-woon

(2010) Magnolia Home Entertainment Blu-ray

In the midst of a high level covert operation NIS agent Kim Soo-hyeon (Lee Byeong-heon) receives a call from his fiancée, Joo-yeon (Oh San-ha), who advises him she has broken down on a remote stretch of road. Whilst on the call, a passerby in a school bus arrives and offers her assistance. Hours later, Joo-yeon is dead. In the frantic hours following her disappearance police and emergency services officers eventually turn up the young woman's sole remains: her severed head. Distraught with the pain of his loss, Soo-hyeon files for temporary leave. Little does anyone realise that the security agent's underlying motive is to exact brutal revenge against his partner's killer.

Former future father-in-law, Squad Chief Jang (Jeon Gook-hwan), smuggles the narrowed list of four suspects in Joo-yeon's murder to Soo-hyeon who immediately sets his plan into action. With the first two suspects proving dead-ends, Soo-hyeong's attentions rapidly shift to career-criminal Jeng Kyeong-cheol (Choi Min-sik) and when the two confront one another it's instantly apparent that the rogue security agent has his man. But instead of taking his fiancée's killer's life on the spot, Soo-hyeon commences an elaborate game of protracted, debilitating vengeance against his foe and the two men escalate their violent confrontation into a bloodthirsty battle that can have only one victor.

From his debut feature, the delightfully off-kilter black comedy *The Quiet Family* (1998), South Korean director Kim Ji-woon has always been a talent to watch. His follow-up, *The Foul King* (2000), was a hilarious dig at both the unsung pressures of the white-collar workforce and the global fascination with the dubious "sports entertainment" that is championship wrestling. On the back of two successful comedies, Kim took a dramatic left-turn into the horror arena with the much loved, and critically acclaimed *A Tale of Two Sisters* (2003), which not only showed the director's diversity but also his ease of adaptability to diametrically opposing genres. Thereafter, he delivered one of the best Korean crime-thrillers of its decade, *A Bittersweet Life* (2005) and drew further international notice with an affectionate homage to the Spaghetti Western in the star-studded *The Good, The Bad, The Weird* (2008). With his latest offering, the spectacularly brutal revenge-thriller *I Saw the Devil* (2010), Kim strikes gold yet again and proves himself one of South Korea's most formidable commercial filmmakers. It's undeniable that his track record thus far remains unblemished.

While *I Saw the Devil* harbors some bloody, and often shocking, violence that will put it at odds with a wider audience, Kim pulls all of his finely tuned elements together flawlessly to produce a positively exhilarating revenge opus that is as engrossing as it is utterly compelling. Once Lee Byeong-heon's *National Intelligence Service* agent kicks his private mission into gear Kim keeps his action-packed crime-thriller a lean, mean and fully-focused force of nature that is free of either dead spots or excess fat that propels itself with such momentum and reckless energy towards its staggering conclusion that the overall effect is simply breathtaking. Headlining a returning Lee Byeong-heon, from Kim's previous *A Bittersweet Life* and *The Good, The Bad, The Weird*, and a coaxed *out of self-imposed exile* Choi Min-sik (*Old Boy*, 2003) (who had refused film projects prior in protest at the reduction in screen quota for domestic product that followed South Korea's *Free Trade Agreement* with the US), *I Saw the Devil* holds up a pair of exceptionally strong leads. As Lee switches into "operations mode", per his elite security training, he gives Soo-hyeon a detached emotional complexity that makes the character a powerhouse killing machine to rival his nemesis. Whereas Choi's Jang Kyeong-cheol functions on a whole different plain of existence, emotionally, morally and conscience severed from his actions to such a degree that anything outside himself is meaningless.

Between Park Hoo-jeong's (*The Unjust*, 2010) strong script and Kim's exceptionally controlled direction, *I Saw the Devil* exhibits such a fiercely high-impact velocity, and one invested with a raw emotional intensity, that the viewer almost fears it will career out of control and come to grief spectacularly before it brings Soo-hyeon's rampage to its literal catharsis. But it never does. Kim keeps a tight rein on his wildly competitive narrative, and duelling juggernauts, pacing the whole piece perfectly within the confines of the film's destructive fight to the finish. At an inflated two hours and twenty two minutes (in Kim's *director's cut*, as under review herein), one would expect the pace to slacken on occasions or at least lose its footing, but (again) it never does. As Choi's character becomes more and more monstrous, from an horrific opening sequences that starts Kyeong-cheol at the bottom before swan-diving him straight into the bowels of Hell, Kim opposes him with Lee's impossibly-steely resolve that drives ever further into almost automaton-like determination. The decision to bring in the *Seoul Action School*'s Jeong Doo-hong (*City of Violence*, 2006) and Heo Myeong-haeng to choreograph the action sequences succeeds dramatically in punching up the film's bite as Lee's NIS-originated combative techniques and special manoeuvres create such an unstoppable force to his character that they counterpoint the animalistic nature of Choi's serial killer seamlessly.

Adding to the monumental impact of Kim's vision is gorgeous cinematography by a debuting Lee Mo-gae that imbues the film with rich, cinematic hues where necessary and garish, crimson-scourged grime or inky blacks that amplify the darkness of both the characters and mounting fatalism of the narrative arc. MOWG's (aka: Lee Sung-hyun) (*Silenced*, 2011) score is similarly expressive and expansive, running traditional motifs in parity with rhythmic percussive themes that reinforce the ritualised tribalism that is transforming the leads into mirror-images of one another. In a decidedly smart, though ultimately well-calculated, move the introduction of Choi's partners-in-crime, the cannibalistic Tae-joo (Choi Moo-seong, *Bestseller* 2010) and his female accomplice Se-jeong (Kim In-seo; whose part is extended in the Korean theatrical version), late in the piece throws open the formerly alluded-to network of evil that Jang is complicit in. It's obvious, during the harrowing opening, that Kyeong-cheol's butcher-like dissection of his victims is leading somewhere extremely dark, but Kim plays his cards close and diverts audience attention away from the allusion through the extended conflict between his (anti)hero and villain. It's a masterful manoeuvre that makes the mid-section's frank revelations all the more shocking, as motivations and histories are handled in such an *off-the-cuff* fashion that it only goes to make their reality all the more grotesque. Amidst the remaining cast, veteran actors Jeon Gook-hwen (*Secret Reunion*, 2010) and Cheon Ho-jin (*The Guard Post*, 2007) impress as the regular police operatives with a vested interest in the case, and Kim Yoon-seo (TV's *Poseidon*, 2011) appears rather briefly as Se-yeon, Joo-yeon's younger sister.

With an already impressive resume under his belt, Kim Ji-woon continues his matchless winning streak with *I Saw the Devil*, a veritable testosterone-fuelled depth-charge of a revenge-thriller. As already mentioned, it's not going to be a film for everyone and there are moments, even as a hardened genre veteran, where Gwak Tae-yong and Hwang Hyo-gyun's grisly makeup effects have the ability to set one's teeth on edge. However, unlike the giddy gore of *survival-horrors* such as *Saw* (2004) or *Hostel* (2005), the sometimes barbaric violence of Kim's story has purpose outside of simple shock value, and that's to underscore the emotions of its themes. That's the major advantage that *I Saw the Devil* has over many of its peers: the rich emotional undertones of its themes and narrative (which Kim also injects with a healthy dose of mood-lightening pitch-black humour along the way). Akin to his main players, Kim puts his audience through the wringer by keeping the momentum white-knuckle and the tension at razor's edge for the full duration of the feature; and that's the signature of a master craftsman. There is release, of sorts, for the protagonist and audience come the finale, but the journey is such an astounding one that *I Saw the Devil* easily cements itself as one of the very best Asian adult thrillers of recent years.

Michael Thomason

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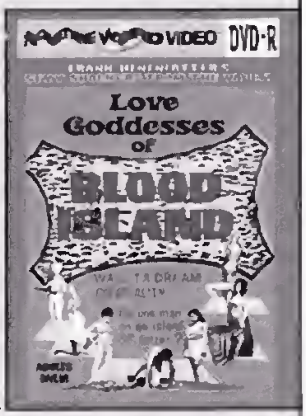
LOVE GODDESSES OF BLOOD ISLAND
Directed by Richard S. Flink
(1963) Something Weird Video DVD-R



Florida certainly has a rich film history: Johnny Weismuller Tarzan movies, various James Bond scenes, *Sea Hunt*, *Scarface*, and of course *The Creature from the Black Lagoon*. Everybody knows about that stuff, but readers of this magazine know where the Sunshine State's hidden cinematic treasure really lies. It is in the works of that weird assortment of oddballs and misfits in Miami who almost single handedly created splatter cinema. Herschell Gordon Lewis, Brad F. Grinter, William Grefe; these were men who were blazing a bloody trail through the beaches of south Florida. But someone got left behind; Richard S. Flink jumped into the fray early, producing *Love Goddesses of Blood Island* in 1963, a work that was at the forefront of all the madness right along with Lewis' *Blood Feast*.

Love Goddesses stars Bill Rogers as a fighter pilot who washes ashore the titular island after his plane goes down at sea. He is dragged from the beach by a handful of amezons, who soon put him to work, using him as a plow horse by day, and a, um, plow *boy* by night. Poor Rogers is in a personal hell, tirelessly labored to the point of being too pooped to pop, yet forced to service the women nightly. His narration sounds like it was snatched right out of a tawdry sex novella or men's adventure magazine of the era: "Later I dozed again, praying that the girl had been satisfied, but I wasn't to be that lucky. She woke me again and again during the night, never permitting me more than one hour of solid sleep." Poor schlub. Rogers eventually attempts to escape with the help of one of the gals (Dawn Meredith, who would appear in *Lullaby of Bareland* the following year), who of course has fallen for him. Rogers went on to appear in a number of south Florida classics (including playing the vampire in Lewis' *A Taste of Blood* in 1967), and otherwise lent his deep voice to some of the characters in many of the Mexican horror films dubbed to English in Coral Gables, Florida in the 1960s.

Aside from producing, Flink also directed the film (under the *nom de plume* Gordon H. Heaver), and his work is even weirder than that of Lewis. While gore was obviously the motivation for Lewis' films, Flink merely throws it in as an afterthought, using it as an exclamation point to his absurd male fantasy. The film begins as a simple, if bizarre, burlesque vignette, then abruptly veers off into extreme gore as a flashback sequence reveals the fate of the island's previous male visitor. One of the gals tells Rogers of how she disemboweled the man during a ceremony, then carved out his heart and ripped off his head with her bare hands. The gore is strikingly similar to Lewis' work—in other words, over-the-top and unconvincing. Crowning it all is the hypnotic "Love Goddess" song sung by Neil Patrick. As the girls do a slow dance around the pool, Rogers falls into a trance while Patrick's voice is heard bellowing a tune about being helpless under the spell of the Love Goddess (Don't watch this while under the influence—of *anything*). While Flink would keep a hand in the south Florida film scene for a while (he produced Grefe's *Sting of Death* in 1965), this would be his only directorial effort. His direction is fairly plain and uninventive, but he managed here to create what may be the most notable—perhaps *only*—example of burlesque/Grand Guignol, a cinematic melding of two theatrical art forms that are worlds apart in concept and purpose. Love it or hate it, that took at least a dash of creativity.

Something Weird had previously included a truncated 27-minute version of the film as one of the extras on the *Death Curse of Tartu*/*Sting of Death* double-bill disc, but the 47-minute version released here is cleaner in appearance. It also bears the title *Six She's and a He*, and it is questionable whether the film was ever officially released as *Love Goddesses of Blood Island* (the 27-minute version previously released by Something Weird had no title card). Ads for the film in the 1960s invariably listed the title as *Six She's and a He*, though some would occasionally use "Love Goddesses of Blood Island" as a promotional tagline. Since the closing credits list characters that do not appear in the film (doctors and nurses), there does seem to have been a longer version at some point.

Otherwise, as is customary with Something Weird, the disc is spilling over with extras, in this case mostly burlesque shorts with similar themes (amazons, jungle girls and the like). These won't likely be to everyone's taste, but if you've already sat through *Love Goddesses of Blood Island*, then the rest of the disc should be up your alley.

Bryan L. Yeatter

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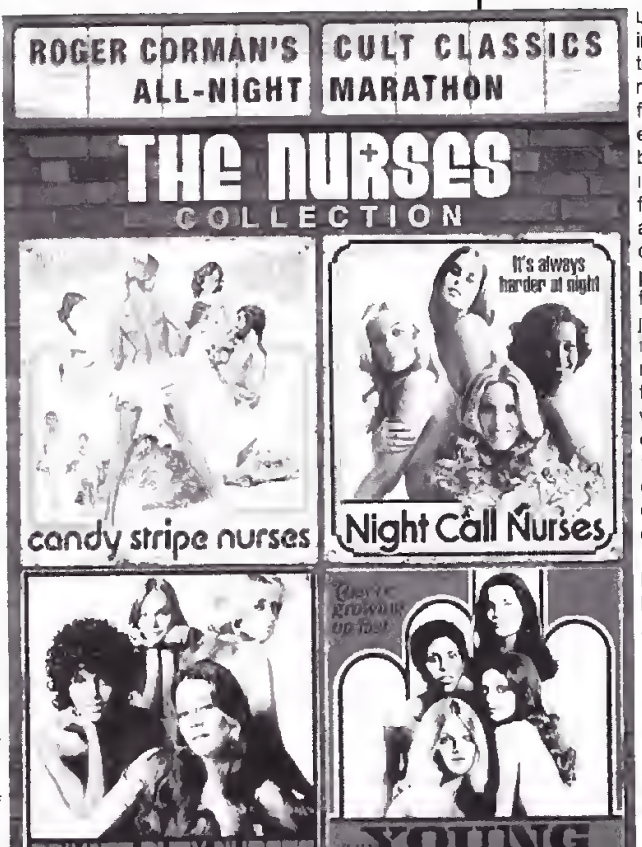
NIGHT CALL NURSES (1972) Directed by Jonathan Kaplan

THE YOUNG NURSES (1973) Directed by Jonathan Kaplan

CANDY STRIPE NURSES (1974) Directed by Allan Holleb

In 1970, Roger Corman's newly-created New World Pictures' first release was *The Student Nurses*, a multi-character soap opera about 4 young women in nursing school. The combination of sexy young actresses, nurses, nudity, and multiple sub-plots with mildly topical themes proved a box-office winner, Corman, never slow on the uptake, turned out a nurse film a year for the next four years, and Shout! Factory has released this follow-up quartet in a 2-DVD package.

The four films in this set share little in the way of cast or crew, but there are many basic similarities. Each has three equally-prominent female protagonists (despite the misleading posters, which always have *four* nurses pictured, possibly a holdover from *The Student Nurses*, which did have 4 nurses), first-time directors behind the camera, no established "name" performers in the leading roles, and relatively short running times (80 minutes or less). Each film contains large amounts of padding (footage of sailboats, hang gliders, motorcycles, water-skiing, kite-flying, basketball, walking-on-the-beach), and have the plots that are awkward blends of soap opera-style melodrama, comedy, "social relevance," action, and exploitation.



The formula was even more narrowly defined in the scripts' narrative structure and content. One of the three nurses was always a minority (3 blacks and one Latina), and one of the protagonists was always involved with a "damaged" love interest (injured Vietnam vet, pill-popping trucker, father-dominated rich kid, pill-popping college basketball player). Full frontal nudity was rare (the only significant shots of pubic hair occur in *The Young Nurses* in a non-sex scene), although the leads all had topless and "discreet" nude scenes which were, admittedly, "relevant" to the plot. In all 4 movies the protagonists clash with the medical "establishment" and there is some attempt at social criticism, reflecting Corman's liberal leanings. Furthermore, virtually all of the nurses are depicted as assertive, competent, intelligent young women and they are legitimately the protagonists of these movies, not mere window-dressing for box-office purposes: if anything, the male characters, particularly the love interests for the nurses, are the superfluous characters in the Corman Nurse series.

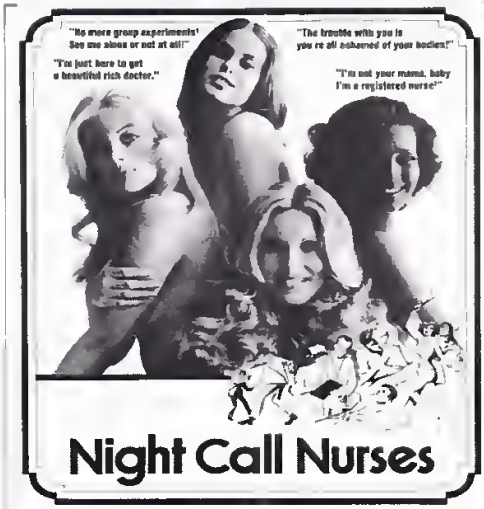
The casts of the four Corman Nurse films feature a few familiar faces, though no stars emerged from the pictures. Of the 12 actresses who played leading roles in the series, perhaps the best-remembered is Candace Rialson (*Candy Stripe Nurses*), although Alana Collins (*Night Call Nurses*) later achieved some fame by first marrying singer Rod Stewart and then actor George Hamilton, and Robin Mattson (*Candy Stripe Nurses*) has had a substantial career in television soap operas. It should be noted that many later reviewers have confused Maria Rojo (*Candy Stripe Nurses*) with the Mexican actress (and later politician) of the same name, but these are two entirely different people. Surprisingly, given the lack of experience of most of these young women and the obvious fact that their appearance was their most important asset, none of them really turns in a bad performance, and several of them do quite well in their roles. Supporting players in the nurse series included director Samuel Fuller, Mantan Moreland, Felton Perry, future director Dennis Dugan, and Corman good-luck charm Dick Miller, who appeared in 3 of the 4 pictures.

Private Duty Nurses (1971), the first Corman sequel to *The Student Nurses*, was written and directed by George Armitage. Although interesting as a time capsule of 1971 America (or to be more accurate, 1971 Southern California), the film is too slow and scatter-shot to be very entertaining. Even the exploitation elements are muted, with limited nudity—3 "romantic" love scenes, one rape, and a brief post-coital scene—and virtually no humor. The nurse-protagonists are Spring, who falls in love with one of her patients, a Vietnam veteran with a plate in his head who persists in the sport of motorcycle racing despite the risks; Lola, who helps a black doctor break the color barrier at the hospital where she works; and Lynn, who—with the aid of a young doctor—investigates a fatality possibly caused by pollution. The latter story is a good example of the barely coherent nature of the script: after spending the whole film tracking down the alleged polluters, Lynn and her friend learn the victim didn't die from pollution! Lynn is raped and the doctor is murdered by those really responsible, drug smugglers who pop up at the last minute (it's possible the script was changed to avoid portraying corporate polluters as killers). *Private Duty Nurses* is also over-loaded with musical interludes and has the usual plethora of visual padding. The performances of the leading actresses are actually rather good but cannot dispel the soap-opera feel of the picture.

Night Call Nurses (1972)—an exploitative but factually incorrect title, since the 3 main characters are *psychiatric* nurses—was directed by Jonathan Kaplan from a script by George Armitage (and an uncredited Danny Opatoshu) and represents a significant improvement over its predecessor. In the first minute, a topless mental patient commits suicide by leaping from the roof of the hospital, and the film hardly pauses for breath from then on. The three nurses have more interaction with each other than in the other pictures, actually appearing to be friends rather than mere co-workers. Janis, like Spring in *Private Duty Nurses*, violates her professional ethics by falling in love with a patient, a redneck trucker whose abuse of drugs brought on a psychotic episode; the "nurse of color" this time is Sandra, who helps free a black prisoner from the prison ward before the authorities can finish him off (as the film ends, she apparently leaves her job and walks off, giving the black power salute); Barbara is victimized by an unscrupulous New Age therapist, who makes her the subject of a cruel experiment. Add a transvestite stalker, a running gag about a mental patient who flashes the nurses at every opportunity, and an extended car/truck chase sequence that takes up the last 10% of the movie, and *Night Call Nurses* is definitely not dull. Kaplan is certainly the most "stylish" of the directors on the Corman Nurse series, demonstrating a penchant for odd camera angles, quick cuts, and surrealistic imagery.

The Young Nurses (1973) was directed by Clinton Kimbro who—as "Clint Kimbrough"—had played the lascivious and manipulative psychotherapist in *Night Call Nurses*. Howard R. Cohen's screenplay assigns each nurse an entirely different genre for her individual sub-plot: in the "soap opera" story, Kitty falls in love with a rich young man who's dominated by his father; in the "crime story," black nurse Michelle exposes a designer-drug ring (headed by cult director Sam Fuller!); in the "socially relevant" story, Joanne challenges the medical establishment's rules about the role of nurses in medicine and is nearly framed for causing the death of a patient. In the end, she resigns and goes to work at a women's clinic. Right on, sister! *The Young Nurses* has a satisfactory nudity and graphic violence quotient and two of the sub-plots are interesting enough (Kitty's rocky relationship with her sailboating swain is hackneyed romantic melodrama but she's frequently nude so that helps pass the time).

Candy Stripe Nurses (1974) is the least serious of the quartet, although writer-director Alan Holleb doesn't turn it into a full-blown comedy. Indeed, two of the sub-plots are dramatic: candy-striper Dianne begins a relationship with a drug-using college basketball player (he's actually shown playing in a game between the Matadors of Cal State Northridge and Cal State Fullerton's Titans), and Marisa (who is forced to become a candy-striper as punishment for bringing a knife to high school and assaulting the teacher who confiscated it!) turns detective to clear a patient—like her, a Latino—of a robbery charge, risking her own life to do so. The third nurse's story carries the picture's comedy burden: randy Sandy has sex with a doctor in the hospital linen closet, then pretends to be a sex clinic employee so she can meet a famous rock star whose virility has been waning. *Candy Stripe Nurses* showed that the nurse genre was all but played out: the three protagonists hardly interact with each other, and the medically-related aspects of the film's plot are minimal (the heroines aren't even full-fledged nurses this time).

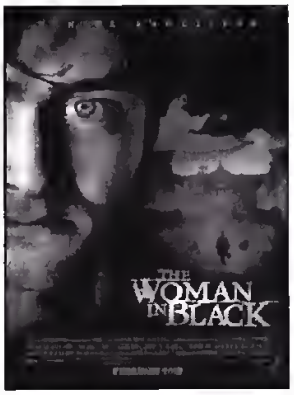


Unlike some previous DVD releases of these films, the four pictures in the *Roger Corman's Cult Classics: The Nurses Collection* set are presented in the correct aspect ratio, and the visual and audio quality is fine. There are two mini-documentaries (around 13 minutes each) included in the set: "Paging Dr. Corman" and "Anatomy of a Nurse Film." The first contains separate interviews with Roger Corman and his wife Julie, who produced the last three films in the series. Both Cormans are entertaining, informative and forthcoming about their roles in the creation of the series. Roger Corman, unpretentious as always, says "We were making something of a pro-feminist statement while at the same time exploiting the nurses." The second documentary features Jonathan Kaplan and Alan Holleb, directors of *Night Cell Nurses* and *Candy Stripe Nurses*, respectively. Kaplan was recommended to the Cormans by Martin Scorsese, a fellow alumni of the NYU Film School, while Holleb was a recent graduate of the film program at UCLA. Both look back on their feature-film directorial debuts with fondness and have some amusing stories to tell about their experience.

Shout! Factory's *Roger Corman's Cult Classics: The Nurses Collection* gives these movies a solid presentation for the curious viewer. The Nurse series provides an interesting look at early 1970s society, but the films are by and large quite mild and hardly worthy of the "exploitation" label, particularly when compared to the more outrageous Women in Prison pictures of the same era. The rigid formula and structure, soap-opera plots, and egregious padding somewhat compromise their entertainment value, although only *Private Duty Nurses* is really a chore to sit through. The others have enough skin, comic eccentricity and action to be passable time-wasters.

David Wilt

THE WOMAN IN BLACK
Directed by James Watkins
(2012) Sony Blu-ray / DVD



Susan Hill's 1983 novel *The Woman in Black* earned quite a following in its native England: by the time the decade was out, it had been adapted into both a hugely successful stage play and an acclaimed 1989 TV-movie (scripted by none other than Nigel "Quatermass" Kneale). Now its latest incarnation comes in the form of a high-profile theatrical film emphasizing both the first post-*Harry Potter* role for Daniel Radcliffe and—perhaps even more significantly—the continuing renaissance of Hammer Films.

The particulars of *The Woman in Black* remain similar in both filmed versions, but the considerable differences in approach and the fact that neither one faithfully reproduces the action of the original novel (nor did the stage play) keep things fresh and unpredictable as one explores. In every case, a young solicitor (named Arthur Kipps in the novel and the new movie, but known as Arthur Kidd in the telefilm) is prevailed upon to take a lengthy journey in order to "settle" the estate of the recently deceased recluse Alice Drablow, whose troubled past includes a devastating incident in which a young boy was swallowed up by the marshes surrounding her manor house—indeed, those very marshes make the Drablow estate literally unapproachable except during hours of low tide. As Kipps/Kidd investigates the story, he finds himself under the sinister surveillance of a mysterious figure in mourning clothes, soon to learn that appearances of that very "woman in black" are directly tied to the deaths of many a child in the vicinity . . . and that shrugging off her presence in his own life won't be easy at all. To say more about any version would move pointlessly into spoiler territory.

Hill's original novel cast Arthur Kipps as a fresh young bachelor eager to make an impression on the law firm employing him (he acquires a wife and children of his own at a much later point in the story). The Kneale-scripted telefilm, directed by Herbert Wise, gives us Adrian Rawlins (in a fine coincidence, the actor would go on to play the *father* of Harry Potter in the blockbuster movie series to follow) as Arthur Kidd, sniffed at by his employer for saddling himself with a wife and children at far too early an age for a professional attorney. This adaptation (set specifically in 1925) is well in keeping with the "quiet" ghost stories favored by British television: the mystery is teased out gradually, as is the notion that Kidd's firm had ulterior motives for sending him on the mission in the first place. Graphic horror is eschewed in favor of the slow build-up to one (terrific) climactic scare and an increasingly troubling denouement, while the audience is never directly subjected to disquieting sequences involving the deaths of children (Kidd actually saves a little girl from a potentially fatal "accident" in this version—he's later informed that plenty of other youngsters weren't quite so lucky).

Enter Hammer Films. Under its newest management, the legendary British studio had recently reclaimed its theatrical heritage with *Let Me In*, a well-reviewed but financially unsuccessful adaptation of the acclaimed Swedish novel. Coming directly on the heels of the original Swedish version (known to us as *Let The Right One In*) as it did, the inevitable compare-and-contrast debates prevented it from carving out its own identity as a "Hammer" production, vampire-themed or not. But such would not be the case with their take on *The Women In Black*, which aggressively twisted the material into a full-blooded Gothic tale far more in keeping with the studio's famous reputation. Here we have Daniel Radcliffe as Arthur Kipps, now an Edwardian-era widower suffering from severe clinical depression even as he tries to raise his four-year-old son (whose mother didn't survive his birth). His dispatch to what is now known as Eel Marsh House is no longer a ruse on the part of his employers—rather, it represents his last chance to pull himself together and save his job. While Arthur was met with little more than grudging acceptance by the locals (who merely wanted him to take care of his business and leave as quickly as possible) in the TV version, here his reception is one of nearly-unbridled hostility—he has no business whatsoever stirring up the ghosts of the past as far as the villagers are concerned, and they, of course, have a very good reason for feeling that way. The hauntings are now far more aggressive, and the Woman in Black compels the local children to take their own lives in increasingly disturbing manners (the very first scene of the film has three little girls simultaneously throwing themselves through windows, and it only gets worse—in this case, the PG-13 rating is something to take quite seriously).

James Watkins (*Eden Lake*) directs with an eye for rich, oppressive atmosphere and an abundance of genuine "shock" moments, perhaps best-displayed in a lengthy centerpiece (almost completely devoid of dialogue) in which Arthur, left completely to the mercies of Eel Marsh House, tries to tear its secrets free. Here, the traditional trappings are most satisfyingly complemented with an unmistakable tribute to Dario Argento's *Deep Red* (you may recall David Hemmings doggedly smashing away at a wall in an abandoned "mystery house" of his own), though instead of a Goblinesque rock score we're given fine work by frequent Wes Craven collaborator Marco Beltrami. Meanwhile, the new film is populated by a far more colorful and eccentric cast of supporting characters than before: for example, Arthur's one local friend is landowner Sam Daily (Ciaran Hinds), whose dotty wife Elizabeth (Janet McTeer) provides some much-needed comic relief with her dainty handling of her beloved "twins" (small dogs who get to sit at the dinner table) before her own haunted past reasserts itself with a vengeance. And the emotional stakes are raised considerably as Arthur launches into a desperate attempt to "fix" everything before it's too late for everybody—details will not be given here, but this completely new climax and resolution is perfect for this fresh take on the story.

Some will undoubtedly find the new *Woman in Black* gratuitously harsh in light of the restraint exercised by its predecessors, but it's just as legitimate an adaptation of the source material as any other (a BBC radio play also exists), it's well-crafted and equally well-acted (Radcliffe is more than fine in the lead: you'll only think of his most famous role if you're determined to do so from the beginning); and most significantly of all, it's exactly what the doctor ordered for long-deprived Hammer Film fanatics, who can take good cheer from its success. Extras on the disc include audio commentary with director James Watkins and screenwriter Jane Goldman, and two featurettes: Inside the perfect thriller: Making *The Woman in Black*, and, No Fear: Daniel Radcliffe as Arthur Kipps.

Shane M. Dallmann

NIGHT TRAIN MURDERS
Directed by Aldo Lado
(1974) Blue Underground Blu-ray

Heading home Christmas Eve to spend the holidays with family in Verona, best friends Margaret (Irene Miracle) and Lisa (Laura D'Angelo) find their redeye train from Munich waylaid once a bomb scare forces a halt in Innsbruck. Swapping transit to a connecting coach line the young women are followed by a pair of hooligans, Blackie (Flevio Bucci) and Curly (Gianfranco De Grassi), whose attention they had attracted on the earlier leg of the journey. As Laura's parents, Giulio (Ennco Maria Salerno) and Laura (Marina Berti), host guests at home the intimidating thugs are joined by a middle-class socialite (Macha Meril) who is fascinated with their rough edges and propensity for violence.

While the festivities in Verona continue into the early hours, oblivious to the impending horror that will come with the dawn, Margaret and Lisa's coach companions' behaviour steers into more erratic and volatile territory. With Curly high on heroin, and Blackie's sexually-fuelled outbursts becoming more threatening, their high society passenger proves far more dangerous and perverse than either girl could have imagined. Goading the young men into violence the woman drinks in the terror of Margaret and Lisa's situation as beatings and sexual assault lead to a passenger (Franco Fabrizi) being roped into their sadistic game. But for the two girls, the worst of their ordeal is still a long way off.

The old adage claims that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, and if that's the case then once upon a time (in the West, haha) Italy's commercial film industry might have been considered one the sincerest of all. The iconic American westerns of the fifties gave rise to the Spaghetti Western in the sixties, in turn generating accepted latter day classics such as Sergio Leone's *The Good, The Bad and the Ugly* (1966), George Romero's cult horrors *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) and *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) went on to spawn both Jorge Grau's *The Living Dead at Manchester Morgue* (1974) and Lucio Fulci's *Zombi 2* (1979) and at the advent of the eighties a little Australian futuristic road-movie, *Mad Max 2* (1982), created a whole gaggle of Rome-based post-apocalyptic epics. However, for every much adored slice of copycat Italian genre cinema there seems to be a seamier underbelly of equally imitative productions that raise more of a red flag than they do critical adulation. I make no apologies for stating that Wes Craven's *Last House on the Left* (1972) is one of the least respected of all the American horror "classics" in my books, so the idea of Italian producer Roberto Infascelli financing a remake of his own was never something that inspired a hint of interest or curiosity from my camp. A couple of decades on, thet old cat-killer got the better of me.

Admittedly, it was Ruggero Deodato's *House on the Edge of the Park* (1980) that convinced me Craven's dank, low-rent drive-in filler original could be given enough spit and polish to fashion it into a worthwhile slice of exploitation cinema. By default that led backwards into variations on the theme and at the forefront of those cash-ins was the notorious Aldo Lado (*Who Saw Her Die?*, 1972) helmed *Late Night Trains* (1974), now better known by one of its alternate titles: *Night Train Murders* (which essentially gives away a key plot-point, sight unseen). Under the *Late Night Trains* title, Lado's film became caught up in the hoopla of Britain's globally embarrassing "*Video Nasties*" controversy and subsequently banned (which created a knock-on effect in Australia, where the film was banned under its *Night Train Murders* label). As any movie buff worth their salt will tell you, once virtually *any* authoritarian body slaps a ban on a film it's like waving a red flag at a bull for the horror geeks. It doesn't matter how good, or bad, that film actually is, a legal ban for some is like a parent or teacher forbidding a child from having something. The more some are told they can't have (or see) something, the more inquisitive they get as to why. Of course, sometimes the passing of time itself will inevitably dull the final experience...

Although Lado, along with fellow screenwriter Renato Izzo, managed to fashion Infascelli's remake plans into a feature more attuned with the dominant themes of the director's earlier works (*Short Night of Glass Dolls* and *Who Saw Her Die?*), the end result is swamped with elements that have since gone on to become genre (and cinema) clichés. Lado's recurrent themes of the adult middle-class set exploiting the youthful lower classes is definitely the central socio-political aspect that sets *Night Train Murders* apart from its America forerunner, but thereafter it's a rocky road of cinematic tropes we've all seen before. In fact, I'd go so far as to say that the clichés and stereotypes on display are what sinks the film as just another derisive exercise in exploitation over Lado's well-documented philosophical ideologies. They're all there: the committed humanitarian who can commit cold-blooded murder at the flick of switch without a hint of conscience-crisis; teenagers with the faces of those well into their twenties, heroin injections that produce an instantaneous high the moment the needle pricks skin; the affluent moral engel with an underpinning sinister psyche; and thet old favourite, the equation that drugs turn the user into a raving, dribbling, bug-eyed psychopath. Ultimately there are painful passages where *Night Train Murders* presents wholly more like lazily written soap-opera theatrics than the intellectual social commentary it purports to be.

On the plus side, the film exudes extremely vibrant and professional cinematography by Italian veteran Gábor Pogány (1915 – 1999), who worked with such giants of the industry as Vittorio de Sica and Riccardo Freda in his earlier years and was responsible for the camerawork on concert-film favorite *Pink Floyd: Live at Pompeii* (1972), that gives Lado's work a dramatic edge over its grubby inspiration. The film really comes into its own visually, in faux-claustrophobic fashion, once the blue carriage nightlights kick in during the second act. Legendary composer Ennio Morricone (*Cinema Paradiso*, 1989) lends a haunting, soulful harmonica driven score that fleetingly echoes his "*Man with a Harmonica*" theme from *Once Upon a Time in the West* (1968) and Moroccan-born Macha Méril (*Deep Red*, 1975) is impressively amoral and disconcerting as the nameless middle-class initiator of the callous violence. Other than that, it's all pretty much downhill from there. The film suffers from languid, dirge-like pacing in its opening act, an unsettling yet detached mid-section (whose sting has undoubtedly been diluted by the decades since its release), and a climactic explosion of fury that unfolds without the slightest hint of remorse or moral/criminal consequence.

The censors may have balked at *Night Train Murders'* challenging subject matter in the day, but it just feels like an empty shell of film from a contemporary standpoint and holds little interest other than that of nostalgic curiosity for a modern audience. The shock value has been dulled by the years in-between and some of its more lurid diversions, such as the involvement of Franco Fabrizi's silent middle-aged voyeur in the rape of Miracle, seem more akin to concessions to the period's sexploitation fantasies (ala *Emmanuelle*, 1974) than plausible additions to the narrative's cycle of violence. Bucci and De Grassi's characters come across more as caricatures than authentic and the whole production just reeks of the quick cash-grab on *Last House on the Left's* notoriety that it was. That said, it is light years ahead of its inspiration as a film and well-intentioned, though flawed, remake so on those counts alone there is at least some minor saving grace for Lado's *Night Train Murders* that the curious can savor.

Michael Thomason

GODZILLA
Directed by Ishiro Honda
(1954) The Criterion Collection (Blu-ray / DVD)
DESTROY ALL MONSTERS
Directed by Ishiro Honda
(1968) Media Blasters/Tokyo Shock (Blu-ray / DVD)

The granddaddy of all Toho *kaiju* classics was originally announced as a Criterion Collection laserdisc release well before the advent of the DVD format, but only now has the plan come to fruition on both DVD and Blu-Ray. And as fans had years ago availed themselves of a fine, heavily-supplemented two-disc set from Classic Media, the question is certainly fair: does the Criterion release stand as a necessary replacement? As Bela Lugosi might have put it: "Necessary? Perhaps. Replacement? Perhaps not."

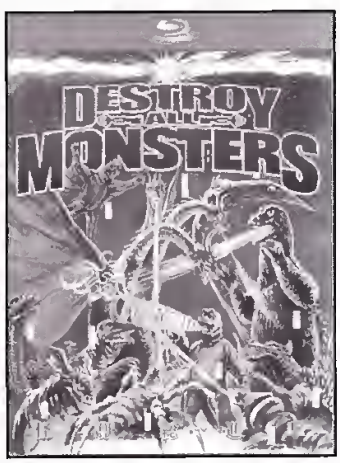
The Criterion release (a two-disc affair of its own) immediately distinguishes itself from the Classic Media issue (sold as *Gojira*) by identifying the film strictly as *Godzilla*. True, the only film known to fans by that one-word title to date has been the controversial American revision of 1998, but as historian David Kalat points out in one of his two accompanying audio commentaries, "Godzilla" has always been as equally valid a pronunciation as "Gojira" in terms of phonetically interpreting the Japanese characters as written. *Godzilla* itself (which scarcely requires an introduction, let alone a plot synopsis, in these pages) has been treated to the most thorough visual clean-up job yet afforded the film—but as was pointed out previously, Toho's less-than-optimum care and storage of their film elements at that time resulted in the occasional irreparable instance of grain and scratchiness. Not only does the film look as good as it ever will on home video, it looks exactly the way it did for Japanese theatrical audiences in 1954.

The Steve Ryfle/Ed Godziszewski commentaries, mini-documentaries and other Classic Media supplements remain exclusive to that release (and make it worth keeping); the theatrical trailers do, of course, reappear in the Criterion edition. But Criterion has supplied a few exclusive aces of their own: most tantalizing are a few scraps of unused special effects footage thought lost forever. Though the surviving frames amount to only a few seconds of screen time, they're incorporated successfully into a new 9m video interview with effects artists Koichi Kawakita and Motoyoshi Tomioka. We're also given a new 14m exploration of Godzilla's place in popular culture as examined by critic Tadao Sato, as well as a scholarly review of the "Lucky Dragon 5" fishing boat incident (a fateful brush with American atomic testing in the Pacific) that inspired the action of the film. But it's up to Kalat (the author of *A Critical History and Filography of Toho's Godzilla Series* is just as much a G-fan as he is a G-expert) to distinguish the Criterion release with his own information-packed audio commentary. Kalat unavoidably covers much of the same ground as had the Classic Media team; mainly biographical information regarding director Ishiro (Inoshiro) Honda, producer Tomoyuki Tanaka, special effects maestro Eiji Tsuburaya, composer Akira Ifukube and various and sundry cast and crew members; but he still offers his personal stamp on the film's significance, its place in history and (most enlighteningly) what he feels it was and was *not* trying to say. One of his more revelatory observations concerns a scene largely taken for granted: as a woman consoles her terrified children by telling them that they'll "be with Daddy" soon, the general consensus has been to assume that "Daddy" was killed in World War II (perhaps by the atomic bomb). Kalat points out what should have been obvious from the beginning—the children are simply too young for their father to have died anywhere near 1945!

But as good as this commentary is, Kalat's take on the American revision *Godzilla, King of the Monsters* (1956, included on Disc 2) is even better—in fact, to this writer it's the true selling point of the Criterion release. I have never understood the scorn with which the Americanized release (starring Raymond Burr, of course) has been treated by fans over the years—I've always liked it, and while I was very happy to finally see Honda's original version in all its glory, my eyes weren't suddenly opened to a level of greatness that the U.S. edit had "destroyed." Kalat spells everything out in (literal) black and white: circa 1956, the most successful Japanese film in American release (Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai,* also a Toho production) grossed approximately $2 million in strict "arthouse" revenue for all its critical acclaim. Popular resistance to reading subtitles caused the art of English dubbing to be regarded as an honor, rather than a stigma. An unadulterated, subtitled release of Honda's *Godzilla* would unquestionably have crashed and burned in the States. But thanks to the efforts of "film doctor" Terry Morse, it became the first true Japanese film sensation on these shores—as the heart and soul of Honda's original still *worked.* It is entirely possible—quite likely, in fact, that Godzilla's place in worldwide popular culture is firmly rooted *here,* and it's high time that someone with authority stepped up and treated *Godzilla, King of the Monsters* with more than "grudging" respect. The long-delayed Criterion Collection release stands as a must.

Toho's ultimate "*kaiju* bash" movie *Destroy All Monsters* (the ninth in the Godzilla series) has been out of print on DVD for years in the States, making its reissue on Blu-Ray a happy occasion indeed.

This is the one that introduced the concept of "Monster Island," onto which all of the Earth's giant monsters—that is to say, ten of Toho's famous creatures—have been gathered in the then-future year of 1999 (the story of just *how* the Earth forces managed to collect them would have made for a fascinating film in its own right, but the details remain a mystery). But scarcely has our story begun than the minds of the monsters are taken over by a race of female aliens known as the Kilaaks, who turn them loose on major cities all over the world, with the exception of Tokyo itself (the global distraction will allow them to set up a permanent base there, seeing as their mind-control devices work equally well on human beings). Yes, *this* is the film in which Godzilla made his one and only appearance in New York City! The forces of human law and order (led by the stalwart Akira Kubo) seek to regain control of the situation (and the monsters), while the Kilaaks retaliate by summoning the three-headed Ghidrah for a battle royal atop Mount Fuji. Also appearing: Rodan, Mothra (in caterpillar form), Anguirus, Gorosaurus (promoted to the pantheon because the suit used in *King Kong Escapes* was still in pristine condition), Manda, Aspiga (the giant spider from *Son of Godzilla* also goes by the name Kumonga), Minya, and (in blink-and-you-miss-them cameos) Barugon and Varan.



As fan/historians Steve Ryfle and Ed Godziszewski (continuing on from their Classic Media duties) make quite clear in their feature-length commentary, the story isn't terribly important here—in fact, it's lifted more or less wholesale from *Monster Zero* (aka *Invasion of Astro Monster*), which at least gave the invading aliens a *reason* to want to take over the Earth. *Destroy All Monsters* succeeds as a sheer spectacle, where younger fans raised on the likes of the amazing *Godzilla, Mothra,* King Ghidorah: Giant Monsters All Out Attack may look back on this 1968 release as dated and cheesy, the truth of the matter is that it was an unprecedented blowout of action and special effects for its time. Said effects were supervised by the legendary Eiji Tsuburaya for the last significant time in his career (the subsequent *Godzilla's Revenge* relied almost exclusively on clips from previous films), but the historians take special note of the highly-detailed work of actual effects director Sademasa Arikawa (sure, anyone might be able to levitate a flying saucer via wirework, but to then have it disappear into a horizontal tunnel in the very same shot?) as well as the colorful, effective art direction and set designs of Yasuyuki Inoue. Combine this with a rousing Akira Ifukube score (including one of his very best "march" themes) and you've got a grand entertainment that sustains itself to this very day.

Destroy All Monsters is presented on Blu-Ray in full 2:35:1 Tohoscope framing—the image quality is quite good, but those expecting a stunning improvement over the previous release are bound to be disappointed—as with other older Toho titles, this is probably as good as the film has ever looked. And while no 5.1 upgrade has been applied to the DTS soundtracks, they still get the job done more than serviceably. To that end, we've been given the original Japanese version and *both* English-language renditions: the "international" dub as heard on the previous disc and, most commendably, the AIP-Titra dub (featuring the voice of Hal Linden as the Kubo character) with which most long-time American fans actually grew up (this must have been a last-minute acquisition as our commentators are heard expressing their regrets at its absence). Optional English subtitles are provided, though the translation seems a tad bit contemporary—most hilarious is an instance in which a frustrated crewman apparently says "Captain, running away sucks!" An especially enjoyable supplement is the 7m condensation of the film sold long ago to those with 8mm projectors, while a photo gallery and a selection of trailers (the Japanese spot is in much better condition than its U.S. counterpart) round out the package. Oh, and one tantalizing trailer drops the hint that the long-unavailable *Godzilla Vs. Megalon* will finally be getting its due on these shores. If that's true, then the only remaining Godzilla films needed on American DVD and/or Blu-Ray will be *Godzilla 1985* and *Godzilla Vs. Biollante* (as the Japanese version of *King Kong Vs. Godzilla* remains an impossible dream, anyway). Stay tuned.

Shane M. Dallmann

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GOG

Directed by Herbert L. Strock
(1954) MGM Limited Edition DVD-R

Don't let the cartoonish, space-age title sequences fool you; with much of the Cold War intrigue of an early Bond film, complete with underground lair and jumpsuit clad personnel, MGM's DVD-R made on demand release of 1954's Gog doesn't disappoint. Although some of the dialogue is a bit stilted, even cheesy at times, this vintage sci-fi flick delivers the goods: menacing robots, a super-computer brain, threats of communist domination (or is it an extra-terrestrial takeover?), a ruggedly handsome leading man, and ladies with bras so pointy they could make the front bumper of a '54 Buick jealous

Lensed by Herbert L. Strock, director of such "B" favorites as *The Crawling Hand* (1963), *Blood of Dracula* (1957), and *I Was A Teenage Frankenstein* (1957), and originally released in widescreen 3-D and 2-D, Gog was the final installment in Strock's "Scientific Investigation" series, following on the heels of 1953's *The Magnetic Monster* (which received a DVD-R release by MGM recently) and *Riders to the Stars* (1954).

The film opens in a subterranean government lab with scientists experimenting on cryogenically freezing a chimp and immediately restoring him to life. Things quickly go awry when one of scientists enters the super-fridge to check on his gauges and the vault-like door mysteriously closes and locks. Faster than you can say *Maximum Overdrive*, some unknown and nefarious force activates the Freeze-O-Meter! Our scientist quickly succumbs to the sub zero temps. A similar fate awaits his red-headed assistant when she discovers his body. Who or what has murdered these fine scientific minds? Only the *Office of Scientific Intelligence* can discover the truth.

Enter the handsomely cool Dr. David Sheppard (Robert Egan), investigative agent of the OSI, a slick-haired, cigarette smoking operative who quickly learns that "the brain" controls just about everything in the secret desert test lab of Dr. Van Ness—*The Fly*'s Herbert Marshall, displaying all the quiet conviction and authority one expects from a clipped British accent, thus lending credence to such lines as "The security of the nation may be at stake!"

Faster than Dr. Sheppard can change into his jumpsuit, an agent on the inside (Constance Dowling), also Sheppard's romantic interest, raises the specter of sabotage, also Dr. Van Ness' chief suspicion. Sheppard is brought up to speed on the research being conducted at the laboratory, all of which sounds surprisingly plausible, if not a bit pedantic. Nothing must stop the work being done on a planned space station, but the scientists keep dropping like flies, all murdered mysteriously by the lab's own malfunctioning test equipment.

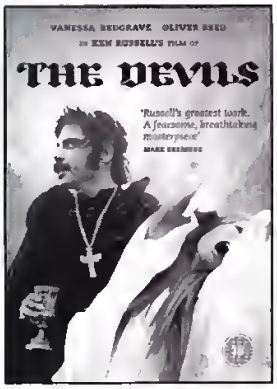
Which brings us to NOVAC, the computer "brain" that controls the titular robot, Gog, and his counter-part, Magog. Although NOVAC predates HAL (of *2001: A Space Odyssey* fame) by a dozen or so years, the similarities are striking. Without divulging too much, I'll just say that if there were any "pod bay doors" at the underground lab, NOVAC would definitely refuse to open them. But who is controlling NOVAC? Aliens? A hostile foreign government? A saboteur-traitor within the underground bunker? That scientist in charge of NOVAC does have a highly suspicious-sounding foreign accent…

As the scientists continue to meet their demise, even a young William Schallert is no match for Gog and Magog as the two robots begin running amok throughout the underground bunker, waving their multiple, furnace duct-like arms maniacally and wreaking havoc on anyone who gets in their way.

The film's color is wonderfully crisp and characteristically 1950's, with the occasional striking reds and blues contrasting nicely against the cold grays, beiges, and blues of the underground lab. The acting, for the most part, is about as good as one can expect from a sci-fi offering of this vintage, even if you wonder how the actor who delivered the line, "At that frequency, sound can kill!" was able to do so with a straight face.

Gog has everything a fan of classic sci-fi could hope for: a solid story, decent acting, maniacal robots, the Space-Race/Cold War backdrop, and even a powerful "solar mirror" which in the wrong hands could make "oceans boil" and "cities burn," making Auric Goldfinger's laser gun look about as powerful as a water pistol. Gog is a must for any serious collector of classic sci-fi.

David A. Kryzsnik



THE DEVILS
Directed by Ken Russell
(1971) BFI IMPORT DVD

In 17th Century France, Loudon is a walled-off city that enjoys self-governance far away from the fey, grubby clutches of King Louis XIII (Graham Armitage). The king doesn't want France to become merely a succession of autonomous city-states, and so hatches a plan to end Loudon's isolation. Loudon is largely under the sway of Father Grandier (Oliver Reed in career-defining performance) who forthrightly questions celibacy forced upon the priesthood by sleeping with every possible woman he can. Evil, hunchbacked nun Sister Jeanne (Vanessa Redgrave in another career-defining role) sexually yearns for Grandier, and so conspires with Father Barre (Michael Gothard) to denounce him as the devil incarnate. Dozens of naked, hysterical nuns do a number of ungodly things in front of a bemused local populace, and Grandier is subjected to a grueling torture session before being burned at the stake. The walls come tumblin' down, and Sister Jeanne finally gets to jump Father Grandier's bones—in a newly restored scene, both literally and posthumously.

The year 1971 was a watershed time for British cinema, with Ken Russell's *The Devils*, Sam Peckinpah's *Straw Dogs* and Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* appearing within months of each other. All three reflected collaboration between British and American filmmakers—*Clockwork* and *Dogs* made by American directors working in Britain, Russell's *The Devils* funded by the American studio Warner Bros. All three films questioned the relationship between good and evil. All three used taboo-bursting sex and violence to make their points, but it was Russell's *The Devils* that added religion and politics into its heady brew. (*Clockwork* touches upon both religion and politics, albeit only briefly). As such, *The Devils* was severaly mistreated on both sides of the Atlantic with arbitrary cuts and alternate versions. (*The Devils* enjoyed a far better fate than Kubnck's *A Clockwork Orange*, however which was banned in the U.K. outright for more than 20 years!)

BFI has come to the rescue with a double-DVD set of *The Devils* that almost collapses under its own weight with extras, but sadly—it doesn't include a version as it was intended to be seen. *The Devils* two most notorious scenes—"The Rape of Christ" and the aforementioned scene where the sister consoles herself with "a souvenir" are included in all their glory in the excellent "Hell on Earth" 2002 documentary, but not in the context of the gorgeously restored version.

"The Rape of Christ" scene, wherein hysterical nuns tear off their habits, run naked to brazenly flaunt their naughty bits, then tear a huge crucifix off a monastery wall in order to rub against a statue of Christ, is not as shocking as many insist. It is an essential scene, as it is intercut with Father Grandier taking communion in a rural setting to take on the armor of Christ to do battle with his enemies, rendering a sequence utilizing everything in its power to be blasphemous—not blasphemous. This reviewer is rather struck by how the images in this scene recall the absurd dance routines that Russell featured in his G-rated musical comedy, *The Boy Friend*, which he directed the very same year! Rather, it is the editing rhythms with rapid zooms in and out coupled with shock cuts that make the scene overwhelmingly intense. It's not out of line to suggest that the staccato editing style could induce epileptic seizures or heart attacks in some viewers, and was left on the cutting room floor over safety concerns.

Topping the list of extras is the aforementioned "Hell on Earth" documentary, which includes the two deleted scenes as well as interviews with both Russell and surviving cast members. Led by film scholar Mark Kermode, both censors and filmmakers recall the fracas surrounding the film. One lady extra recalls that all the actresses who played nuns were given a sheet of paper explaining what was expected of them—and if they disagreed, they should go home! The documentary ends with Kermode, Russell and cast members retiring to Russell's rural cottage to watch the film once more, their reaction being mostly . . . "Is that all there is?"

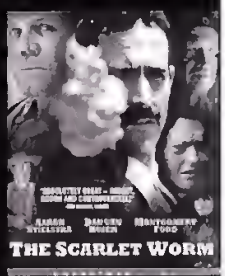
There is a brief two-minute introduction from Kermode, and a lively audio commentary with Russell, Kermode, longtime Russell editor Michael Bradsell and Paul Joyce. The commentary points out many of the talented hands at work. Derek Jarman is praised for his futuristic, stark white brick sets, giving The Devils the look of a science-fiction epic. The costumes by Shirley Russell are also worthy of note. (This reviewer suggests that the artificial look of the art direction and costume design aids the audience with a degree of detachment from the grisly violence and ugly truths presented in the film.) "Director of Devils" a 22-minute promotional piece from 1971, has candid comments from Russell as well as Sir Peter Maxwell Davies conducting his unique, nails-on-chalkboard musical score.

There is also onset footage with Michael Bradsell commentary. There is an onstage question-and-answer conversation with Russell conducted by Kermode that was shot in 2004. There is the original U.K. trailer as well as the U.S. trailer for the *The Devils* ("*The Devils* . . . is not for everyone!" wams the stern-voiced narrator of the U.S trailer) On top of everything else, there is a profusely illustrated booklet on the film. The most avid fan of this film will leave this set utterly satiated

The one surprise extra presented on the discs is the early Ken Russell short, "Amelia and the Angel," a black-and-white silent film with narration and musical score. Aimed at children, the film tells the story of a precocious little girl who can't resist taking home her angel wings prior to her dance recital. Warned by her teacher that if the wings are damaged in any way, she will not be allowed to perform—the wings are predictably damaged beyond repair. All seems lost until Divine intervention arrives from a real angel, and Amelia is able to rejoin her friends. Sweet and cheerful, "Amelia" it is the polar opposite extreme of *The Devils*, until one takes into account that spirituality, redemption and Christianity runs throughout all of Russell's films—albeit films that conservative clergy would be hesitant to endorse.

Greg Goodsell

THE SCARLET WORM
Directed by Michael Fredianelli
(2011) Unearthed Films Blu-ray / DVD



The Scarlet Worm is a gritty, violent, waird Western from prolific indie director Michael Fredianelli, shot on a shoestring but looking like a much more grandly budgeted film. Made by e group of film fanatics (most of whom appear in the film and served as co-producers), it refarences everything from classic spaghetti Wasterns to the work of the Coen Brothers.

Print (Aaron Stielstra) is a dapper hired gun for corrupt rancher Mr. Paul (Brett Halsey). Not content to simply kill cattle thieves and rival cowboys, Print takes a more "poetic" approach, executing elaborately planned assassinations and then staging the bodies in bizarre (and often sexually suggestive) posas; when the film opens, he's just stuffed the naked corpse of a man (screenwriter David Lambert) inside the carcass of a butchered steer.

Mr. Paul asks Print to make an example of a creepy German brothel owner named Heinrich Kley (Dan van Husen, whose credits includa averything from Herzog's *Nosferatu* to *Salon Kitty* and a number of spaghetti Westerns). Kley has been performing brutal abortions on his small stabla of prostitutes, which makes him a particularly appealing target to the righteous Print. With tha help of a young killer-in-treining (Derek Hertig), he sets about ingratiating himself with the Teutonic abortionist in preparation for his axecution.

Of course, things don't go as planned and the two gunmen find themselves pulled into a series of bloody and violent gunfights.

The film looks fantastic, whether the camera is sweeping across classic Westarn vistas (hey, there's Vasquez Rocks!) or lingering on the appropriately unerotic squalor of the frontier bordello. The action sequences ere aspecially impressive, with Fredianelli and cinematographer Michael Martinez deftly handling a series of increasingly apic and complicated gunfights involving dozens of armed extras and countless squibs.

The Scarlet Worm is actually quite gory, and nearly every gunshot is accompanied by significant blood spatter. (There's also a fairly upsetting abortion sequence as well.) The only effects that don't quite pass muster are a couple of digital sequences that look too artificial against dusty backdrops.

As is tha casa with a lot of indapendent productions, the acting is uneven. Vatarens Halsey and van Husen are in fine form—especially van Husen, whose bent view of religion and oddly practical notions about tha sin of fornication make him a compelling villain. Also watch for a brief appearance (as a judga) from Michael Foreet, who appeared in *Beast from Haunted Cave* (1959) and countless TV and European westerns.

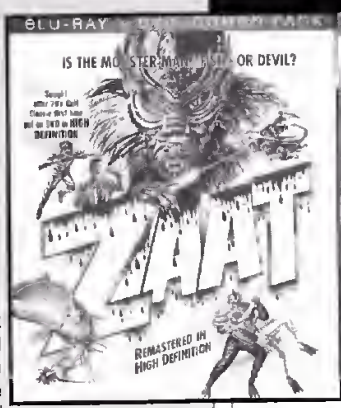
Stielstra (who also wrote tha axcellent score) is good as the style-obsessed killer, but I found myself wishing he'd slow down his delivery a bit; this is a film that takes its time, and his monologues (and the dalivery of several of the other younger playars) just wasn't quita deliberate enough to match the pace set by the director and editor.

That said, The *Scarlet Worm* is a weird, compelling and engaging (if flewed) film that demonstrates just how much can be accomplished on a miniscule budget (reportedly around $25,000). Fredianelli has already directed another four films since completing this one (including the horror anthology *Coin*), and it will be interesting to see what ha and his cohorts can accomplish moving forward.

The Blu-ray / DVD includes trailers for *The Scarlet Worm* and other Wild Dogs productions, two informative commentary tracks (featuring Lambert, co-producers/actors Mike Malloy and Eric Zaldivar, and other cast members), and a nice little featurette about the making of the film.

Brian Albright

ZAAT
Directed by Don Barton
(1971) Cultra Blu-ray/DVD combo



"They think I'm insane! *They're* the onas who are *insane*!" So says Dr. Leopold in his voiceover monologue that opens *Zaat*, a 1971 monster movia of the old school variety. No nudity, and very little gore here, so fans of modem horror may lose patience with it, but there is plenty of sincere affection for the genre in this homespun production shot in Jacksonville, Floride and the surrounding area.

So, what is Leopold so bent out of shape about? It would seem his superiors took a dim view of the experiment he pioneered to create a human/walking catfish hybrid, and he subsequently found himself shunned by the scientific community (everybody got hung up on his request for human guinea pigs, among other things). No mad scientist worth his weight in salt would let that stop them, and Leopold shows he has enough faith in what he's doing to use himself es a test subject. How many mad doctors have the stones to try that? Well, the walking catfish thing doesn't really pan out, as Laopold is forcad to admit upon seeing his new visage in a mirror ("Nothing at all like the catfish," he exclaims in e thought narration voiceover. "But it's beautiful."). Ha does, however, manage to transform himself into some sort of monster, and runs around killing the scientists who rejected his theories (as well as a few other stray victims).

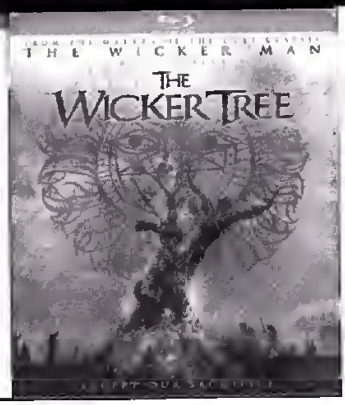
Who would have thought *Zaat* would ever get the Blu-ray treatment, with a beautiful remastered print and a commentary track reuniting director/producer/screenwriter Don Barton, tachnical director Ron Kivett (who also designed the monster costume and got story credit), and actor Paul Galloway (Shenff Lou Krantz). Watching the film along with those guys is e lot of fun, and the disc otherwise offers a 2001 radio interview with 6' 8" Wade Popwell, the now-deceased actor who played the monster, as well as a before and after comparison of the film's remastering. Extras include trailers, a still gallery, and some emusing outtakes of Popwell trying to navigate his way around in the cumbersome monster costume; all that is missing are trailers for the film's 1974 reissue as *Blood Waters of Dr. Z*.

Partially shot in Silver Springs near Ocala, Florida (which also served as a location for *Creature from the Black Lagoon* in 1954), and Rainbow Springs, near Dunnellon, Florida (where Steve Hawkes and Kitty Swan were badly burned filming *Tarzan and the Brown Prince*), *Zaat* is not in the same leagua as the 1950s monster movias it harkens back to, but like those films it seeks to have fun more than anything else, and that's what comes through. The truth is, the type of film that *Zaat* sought to emulate was already passé some time before Barton and company embarked on their labor of love, so you'll likely also need to have an appreciation for the genre to fully enjoy the work here.

Nowadays, anyone can pick up a video camara and make a movie. In 1971 it took a good deal more to accomplish such a task, with the cost of equipment, film stock, processing of that stock, editing; it was a very expensive undertaking even for a low budget work. Barton had a true passion for his project, and his accomplishmant now can be seen by a larger audience, in glorious (but unnecessary) high definition. It's great to find these guys basking in the glory of *Zaat* all over again.

Bryan L. Yeatter

THE WICKER TREE
Directed by Robin Hardy
(2011) Anchor Bay Blu-ray / DVD



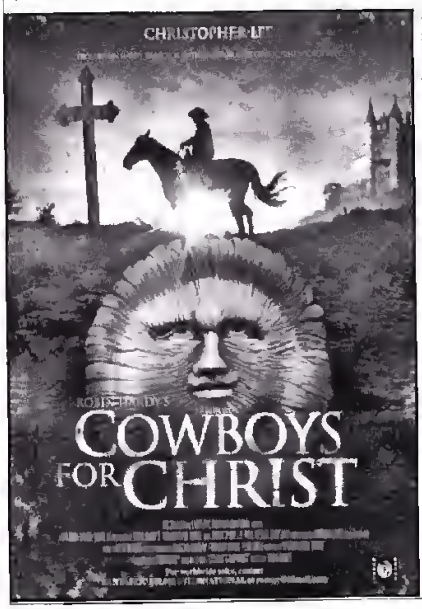
It took over twenty-five years, but the official follow-up to Robin Hardy's 1973 classic *The Wickar Man* is finally here. For the record, *The Wicker Tree* has nothing to do with the Neil LaBute/Nicolas Cage remake—but as much as one might wish to draw the curtain of charity over that particular misogynistic misfire, one should at least acknowledge that it freshly rastored the title to tha public consciousness. Hera, Hardy works without the benefit of original screenwriter Anthony Shaffer (who died in 2001) and provides a screen adaptation of his own novel "Cowboys for Christ" (this admittedly catchy moniker was eventually "sacrificed" for the sake of a title carrying the proper recognition valua).

Tha Wicker Man itself didn't seem to leave much room for a sequel at first glance, but it did dangle the implication that the effect of the final ritual on the harvest to follow would directly affect the fate of Lord Summerisla (Chnstopher Lee) himself. *The Wickar Trea*, however, makes no mention of what happened next in Summerisle, choosing to follow a similar-but-different course of events in the fictitious Scottish village of Tressock. Here we find young musical sensation Beth Boothby (Brittania Nicole) and boyfnend "Cowboy" Steve (Henry Garrett), a pair of born-again, country-singing, promise-ring wearing American evangelists on a mission to spread the good news of Jesus to their unenlightened brothers and sisters in Scotland. Predictably, their door-to-door campaign is met with everything from indifference to resistance, but the people of Tressock are only too happy to have the duo as honored guests—and perhaps they'd like to play important roles in the upcoming May Day festivities?

If you're the least bit familiar with *either* of this film's cinematic predecessors, you already know what's up. And even if you're not, the villagers (led by Graham McTavish and Jacqueline Leonard as Lord and Lady Morrison) helpfully allow you to listen in as they whisper their sinister intentions to each other). And as there's no false trail of breadcrumbs to follow in this case, one realizes fairly soon that *The Wicker Tree* is going to have to come up with a lot more than a final "Gotcha!" if it's to succeed.

To that and, there's quite a lot that works in the film's favor. Nicol and Garrett are quite believable as the charmingly naive couple destined to face temptation: she by the ghost of her former "slutty" persona; and he by the frustrations of the flesh symbolized by the ring he reluctantly wears—as Lolly, Honaysuckle Weaks is only too happy to do the Britt Ekland honors and lure the Cowboy off of his horse. An interesting substitute for the vital apple crop is the presence of a nuclear power plant which is almost certainly responsible for the difficulty the Tressockians face in their attempt to "be fruitful and multiply," and McTavish's Mornson offers a fine contrast to Lord Summerisle—raplacing Lee's passionate pagan with a cynic who'll publicly display his belief in anything so long as it achieves the desired results. Best of all, thematic continuity is maintained with a fine array of pagan folk songs enjoyed communally by the villagers... though one Christian hymn in particular piques their enthusiasm in one of tha best touches.

A literate script, absorbing local flavor and colorful characters keep things more than satisfying for quite a while—but then, unfortunately, there's the matter of bringing the story to a conclusion. Broader humor than Hardy ever allowed in the original makes an unwelcome appearance: Lolly's efforts to maintain the arousal of her half-Italian "stud" are amusing for a while but and up resembling a Benny Hill sketch; "crotch" violence is played for laughs; and let's not forget the unfortunate feline that fulfills the *exact same function* as the cat in 1964's *The Castle of the Living Dead*, which also starred Christopher Lee And speaking of Christopher Lee? Forget the high hopes raised by his listing in the opening titles—his brief, feeble flashback cameo as an "Old Gentleman" who may or may not be Lord Summerisle is one of the film's biggest disappointments. And while Ms. Nicol, as mentioned, is fine throughout most of the film, she drops the ball completely when har character is called upon to make a dramatic swarve during the climactic goings-on, leaving Hardy's semi-sequel to stumble through a distressingly predictable finale. *The Wicker Tree* is truly all about the journey that gels you nowhere fast.



Anchor Bay has released the film (properly dedicated to the late Edward Woodward, star of the original *Wicker Man*) on DVD and Blu-ray with a "making-of" featurette, a selection of deleted scenes and the original theatrical trailer: one wishes that Robin Hardy had come aboard for a feature commentary, but curiosity valua alone is likely to halp this title find a reasonable audience.

Shane M. Dallmann

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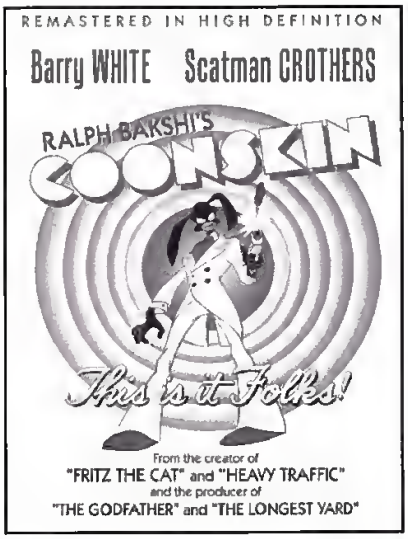
COONSKIN
Directed by Ralph Bakshi
(1975) Xenon DVD



Conceived as *Harlem Nights* long before Eddie Murphy used the title and variously disguised with such non-descript monikers as *Bustin' Out* and *Street Fight* over the years, Ralph Bakshi's most controversial film is best approached unflinchingly under its best known and most confrontational title (which made Bakshi himself nervous). *Coonskin* was no simple case of a white filmmaker making a shrewd investment in the popular "blaxploitation" cycle of the 1970s (see Larry Cohen's *Black Caesar* and *Hell Up In Harlem*, for example), Bakshi himself had an extremely personal stake in his chosen material, having grown up (perfectly accepted) in all-black neighborhoods and even having spent time as the only white student in a black school until segregationist concerns led to his forcible removal by the police! Meanwhile, the career animator (Bakshi had contributed to everything from *Deputy Dawg* to *Spider-Man* before launching into such then X-rated feature fare as *Fritz the Cat* and *Heavy Traffic*) found a contemporary take on Disney's *Song of the South* (still enjoying the occasional re-release before the studio abruptly withdrew the film from domestic circulation) irresistible as a vehicle with which to rub the most brutal ethnic stereotypes imaginable into the faces of viewers who had long taken them for granted in the world of entertainment.

After a pointed animated message for the benefit of the "white folks" in the audience (Bakshi himself declared *Coonskin* to be a "black" film for white viewers), a certain beloved film and television personality lives up to his original professional billing as "Scat Man Crothers" as he delivers the snappy number "I'm A Nigger Man" (a laundry list of images comparable to "Colored Spade" from the musical *Hair*) over the opening titles. In the live-action framing segments, Crothers is "Pappy," a wise old convict seen here assisting young Randy (Philip Thomas, later far better known as Philip Michael Thomas of *Miami Vice*) on an attempted breakout from a deep South prison. As Randy anxiously awaits the arrival of his cohorts "Preacherman" (actor/playwright Charles Gordone) and "Sampson" (singer Barry White), Pappy whiles away the hours by playing Uncle Remus as he relates the story of three comparable young "brothers" (voiced by their live-action counterparts in the animated bulk of the film: one of the many non-credited voice artists was none other than Al "Grandpa" Lewis!). Brother Rabbit, Preacher Fox and Brother Bear (audaciously introduced over the concentric orange circles forever associated with Warner Bros. "Looney Tunes" offerings) are forced to flee the South when a disastrous incident at the local whorehouse ends with their murder of the county sheriff. The three, led by delusional dreams of the glories waiting for them in the all black paradise of Harlem, face yet another reality check when they actually reach their destination. First up is a confrontation with a phony revolutionary "Savior" (an unforgettable, morbidly obese caricature who prances fully nude in front of his congregation as he howls the Gospel of Kill Whitey) who obviously cares about nothing but his hefty collection plate. After fatally outwitting the Savior (utilizing, among other things, a terrific variation on "but, PLEEEASE don't throw me in the briar patch!"), Brother Rabbit announces that he's ready to take over the Harlem crime scene. The revolutionaries are perfectly willing to accept him as their new leader as long as he can prove himself just two more times: first, by getting rid of Madigan (a viciously racist Irish cop who's been terrorizing the neighborhood); and then—as the criminal element is actually controlled by the Italian Mafia?—by seeing to the Godfather himself. With only the loyalty and muscle of Brother Bear and the extremely dubious moral support of Preacher Fox to back him up, Brother Rabbit takes on the challenge . . .

The three protagonists are depicted as stylized animals (Brother Rabbit, in particular, cuts a fine figure as a slickly-dressed, jet-black "mack daddy"), but the supporting "human" cast must be seen to be believed. The huge-lipped, slack-jawed po' black figures visible throughout the history of animation (including high-profile Bugs Bunny and Walter Lantz cartoons) are in abundance, but that's only the tip of the iceberg: Bakshi has barely begun to go to town with his depictions of Southern rednecks, Jews, gays and Italian mobsters, but only those who haven't actually seen the film (and make no mistake, there were plenty of angry voices representing just such non-viewers) could think that this was anything less than truly vicious satire (can you possibly take it seriously when an Italian hitman disguises himself in minstrel blackface and opens fire with the line "Greetings from the Mafia!")? These increasingly violent (and sexually explicit) incidents are punctuated throughout the film with vignettes in which an ill-fated shoeshine boy continually tries to claim a buxom, white "Miss U.S.A." as his rightfully-earned reward (if it's a "message" you seek amidst the mayhem, look no further) and surreal live-action pieces (one character's funeral casket is serenaded by musical mimes aboard an otherwise-empty subway car, for instance) as we build up to both the animated "Tar Baby" climax and the brutal finale of the framing story. You may not like everything *Coonskin* makes you look at, but you're not likely to dismiss such an explosive work anytime soon.

The film's re-release on DVD was stalled by a series of copyright battles . . . Xenon Video now presents a fully-authorized, anamorphically-enhanced widescreen version, which unfortunately is void of any extra features.

Shane M. Dallmann

VIRGIN WITCH
Directed by Ray Austin
(1971) Redemption / Kino Blu-ray / DVD

Here's a bit of free advise—never, ever become the leader of a Satanic witches' cult. You will only meet morally questionable people who want your position. This admonishment is completely ignored in *Virgin Witch*, a British horror-sexploitation hybrid that is good for some peek-a-boo nudity and the stray chuckle or two. Two ne'er-do-well sisters, Anne and Betty—played by real-life sisters Ann and Vicki Michelle—embark on a modeling career. Sybil Waite (Patricia Haines), the dried-up old lesbian who runs an advertising agency develops the hots for Betty and sets up a modeling session in the countryside near a gloomy mansion. In reality, the older folks at the manse – including a terrifyingly butch housekeeper, plot to make Ann a (highly unlikely) virgin sacrifice in one of their rituals. Not an awful lot happens, and the bad guys are deposed for a younger generation of evil.

Virgin Witch is a highly dated bit of hokum with a certain nostalgic value. More lesbian exploitation than horror, the story relies on the creaky pulp novel cliché of an older woman seducing a younger, buxom woman into the Rites of Sappho. Such a device was old hat in both paperback originals and sex films by 1971. In addition, all of the male characters are unsympathetic and dismissive. As one bloke puts it about Sybil, "She fancies birds!" Director Austin and company were confident that the flesh on display would distract audiences from the fact that the film has very little going on in the fright department. One especially telling scene has Ann becoming terrified at the sight of a normal old codger with a smile on his face, to which she runs away, fainting dead away from fright! *Virgin Witch* does have one effective scene where Ann uses her new-found psychic powers to burn a photograph of a rival. The photograph crumples from the flames, and then uncurls magically from running the film in reverse, this time showing her rival's face wracked with pain. While knee-jerk and obvious, this scene remains strangely unsettling.

Another bright spot in the *Virgin Witch* is a soul song crooned in a nightclub by lovely chanteuse Helen Downing, entitled "You Go Your Way." It's a rare example of the padding being more entertaining than the film surrounding it.

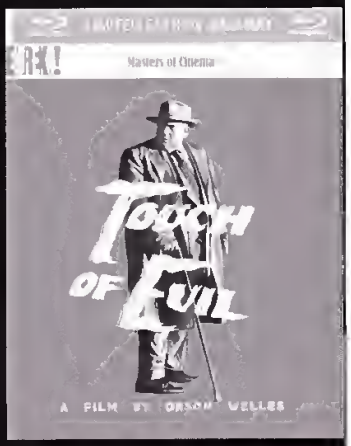
Not surprisingly, the story behind the film is far more interesting than the film's story. Chief among them was the fact that this rather sleazy bit of skin flick hooliganism was the work of several people involved in the popular BBC-TV soap opera *Crossroads*. The guilty parties all hotly denied the fact until the truth came out years later in a men's mag.

Filmed in Surrey, the country house location, Pirbright, Admiral's Walk would also serve as the setting in *Satan's Slave* (1976) and *Terror* (1978), both directed by Norman J. Warren. This writer will also bet a sawbuck that this location was also used by director Andy Milligan for *The Body Beneath* (1970) and *The Rats are Coming! The Werewolves Are Here!* (1972), as a highly distinctive brick courtyard are seen in all five of the above films.

Virgin Witch is a natural for Redemption films, who has done a bang-up job on extras for such an old—and somewhat dubious title. There is a stills gallery, as well as film's original trailer. The high definition re-master is an improvement over the 2006 DVD edition. Star Ann Michelle reportedly doesn't care to discuss the feature, so no audio commentenes are offered. If you revel in vintage skin mags, where everything is stained in "bachelor pad" shades of beige and tan, you may want to take a chance on this number. However—the film's title alone should give ample warning that it's not very much fun.

Greg Goodsell

TOUCH OF EVIL
Directed by Orson Welles
(1958) Eureka! / Master of Cinema import Blu-ray (Region B)



In his documentary *Working with Orson Welles*, cinematographer Gary Graver talked about the profound effect *Touch of Evil* had on him as a young, aspiring filmmaker. Graver said: "I came out of the theater and I said to myself, 'My gosh, people can really make a movie like this? It's so exciting, so rich with imagination.'"

And to think, Graver had only watched the hack-job Universal did on the film over Welles' objections. The fact that such an inferior edit could make such a great impression is very illustrative of how powerful a work Welles had made. It's the same version most of us first saw, and we all had the same response—*Wow*! Little did we know how much better a film Welles had actually made before the geniuses at Universal took it away, tinkered with it, added new scenes, re-shot others, laid music where it shouldn't have been; it's ridiculous that anyone thought to improve on what Welles had done. You may well ask what the fuss is about. If Universal's retooling was good enough to wow us all and influence a generation of filmmakers, then where was the harm? But the truth is we all got cheated, nobody more so than Welles; after all, his name was on that work. It's a matter of outrage, of taking offense to a presumptuousness that would opt for a misguided commerciality over artistic merit, and to a bunch of clods thinking they knew better. Clearly they were wrong, and although he didn't live to see it, history has proven Welles right.

For those of you who need to get caught up, a quick primer: shot in 1957 and released by Universal in 1958, *Touch of Evil* was written and directed by Welles and gives an account of two cops working opposite sides of the U.S./Mexican border and finding themselves at odds over a car bombing at a border crossing. Straightedge Mexican cop Charlton Heston winds up locking horns with highly respected, but thoroughly sleazy, U.S. police captain Welles. Heston is determined to tag Welles for planting evidence, prompting Welles to try and frame Heston and his wife (Janet Leigh) for narcotics trafficking.

With *Touch of Evil* Welles created one of the last great film noirs, and one of the best works of his own career. That much came through even in Universal's original 95-minute theatrical release in 1958. After completing principal photography on the film in 1957, Welles had departed for Mexico to raise capital for *Don Quixote* (an ongoing, and ultimately unfinished, work), and it was during that time that Universal performed the dastardly deed, bringing in Harry Keller to shoot new scenes and re-shoot others (and, no, that's not a dig at Keller). While the studio claimed to have tried to convince Welles to return and do additional pick-up shots, Welles would deny this and was thoroughly dismayed upon viewing the film before its release. He composed a 58-page memo to the studio in the hope of convincing executives to adhere to his original vision of the film, but to no avail; the studio ignored the majority of Welles' suggestions, and released *Touch of Evil* as they wanted it to be. Compounding their folly, Universal relegated this masterpiece to B-movie status by shuffling it to the bottom half of double-bills.

In 1975, a 108-minute edit of the film was discovered (now called the "1958 Preview Version"), and was falsely declared to be Welles' edit. It was released as such in 1976, but was subsequently determined to fall short of Welles' vision as laid out in his memo. Finally, in 1998—regrettably more than a decade after Welles had passed—the studio undertook re-editing *Touch of Evil* to Welles' specifications using his original shooting script and the 1958 memo as roadmaps. Unfortunately, it was not possible to completely accomplish this, as some of Welles' excised original scenes no longer existed. Still, the resulting 110-minute version is much closer to the director's original vision, and is far and away the best of the three distinct versions.

Touch of Evil is renowned for its opening scene, a three-plus minute tracking shot following a car through the Mexican border town, and eventually across the border where it explodes. It is a remarkable and groundbreaking shot, studied by film students in all the years since, yet—unbelievably—even that scene was not immune to Universal's meddling. As it was the opening scene, the decision was made to overlay the credits as the scene played, an imbecilic choice that only creates distraction. Just as obnoxious was the decision to play Henry Mancini's film score over the scene. Excellent though Mancini's music is, it obliterated the cacophony of sounds Welles had carefully orchestrated as the camera snakes its way through town.

Though the 1998 re-edit is not entirely Welles' vision, short of his rough cut magically reappearing, it is likely as close as we will get to seeing the film he wanted to release. After viewing the '98 version, you may have no need for the other releases, but if you are inclined to study, compare and contrast, or are simply curious, all three versions are included here. The 1998 re-edit and 1958 theatrical version are both presented in 1.37:1 and 1.85:1, while the 1958 Preview Version is presented in 1.85:1, making a total of five versions to choose from. There are also four separate commentaries, and while they are all fascinating, of particular worth is the commentary provided by stars Heston and Leigh on the reconstructed version. Both actors offer valuable memories and asides, and are joined by Rick Schmidlin, producer of the 1998 re-edit, whose research also yields useful insights, even to the point that he is compelled to correct the stars on occasion. Add in two featurettes totaling 39 minutes, and a 56-page booklet with various essays (including one by Welles), and you might get the impression that Universal finally got wise to the significance of the work.

Bryan L. Yeatter

FRIGHT NIGHT
Directed by Tom Holland
(1985) Twilight Time Blu-ray

Fright Night has its roots in director Tom Holland's script for Richard Franklin's *Cloak & Dagger*, with both being boy-who-cried-wolf tales taking place underneath the surfaces of suburbia. Beneath the veneer of well-tended lawns and cheery neighbors lie secret agent shenanigans (*Cloak & Dagger*) or a vampire whose sights are set on your high school girlfriend (*Fright Night*).

Charlie Brewster (William Ragsdale) is your everyday high-schooler with a penchant for all-American pursuits like late-night horror hosts, greasy cheeseburgers and making out with his girlfriend (Amanda Bearse). His dapper neighbor Jerry Dandridge (Chris Sarandon) seems suspicious, and it's fairly early on that Brewster sees him sucking the blood out of a high-priced call girl from the vantage point of his bedroom window.

Through the machinations of his sarcastic best friend Evil Ed (Stephen Geoffreys, of *976-Evil*) and girlfriend, Brewster is introduced to his hero, Peter Vincent (Roddy McDowall, in a late great role) and the adventure unwinds to find the unlikely pairing of horror host and teen fending off the undead.

With a moody synth rock score (plus a song by Sparks) and memorable set pieces (including a nightclub seduction between Sarandon and Bearse), *Fright Night* is gleefully 80s and revels in pastels and its Amblin-esque atmosphere of a small town faced with the incredible. Old-school practical make-up and visual effects by the great Richard Edlund also help made *Fright Night* one of those sleepover favorites of teens growing up.

Followed by a remake and a sequel that took the curious approach of shooting in true widescreen 2.35:1. Ragsdale and McDowall returned to battle the sister of Dandridge, but no one else returned; in true French Connection II fashion, Ragsdale became a victim this time, almost succumbing to vampirism.

Extras are at a minimum. Tom Holland and Chris Sarandon recorded a commentary that was a website exclusive a number of years ago, but on this release, just expect an alternate audio track sans dialogue and some all-too-brief liner notes.

Reviewing this title almost feels a little like boasting. the 3000 limited edition blu-ray sold out almost immediately, and now fetches upwards of 200 bucks (and skyrocketing) for copies on eBay.

Twilight Time, dealing almost exclusively in lesser-known but still worthwhile cult titles (like John Huston's *The Kremlin Letter*), had no idea the voracious appetite horror fans have for this nostalgic gem from the 80s that sees its heroes use wink-wink conventional vampire movie knowledge to dispatch their bloodsuckers of the night.

Aaron Graham

NIGHTMARE
Directed by Romano Scavolini
(1981) Code Red DVD

George Tatum (Baird Stafford) is a mental patient, sequestered away in a New York sanitarium for some unnamed, horrible childhood experience. George whiles away the hours in a straitjacket, propped in a wheelchair, reliving gory nightmares—but management decides it's time to mainstream him into society, and kicks him out into the cold, cruel world. Wandering through the pre-Mayor Giuliani 42nd Street, George finds time to take in a grimy peep show or two—which leaves him writhing on the floor, foaming at the mouth in appreciation. At the same time, single mom of three Susan (Sharon Smith) in a drab Florida suburb finds love anew in the arms of Tommy Chong lookalike Bob (Mik Cribben). This affair doesn't sit well with her youngest son, C. J. (C. J. Temper) who stages gory pranks to win her attention. As George goes on a killing spree throughout the tri-state area and Susan tries to balance her home life with new love, the two disparate stories somehow connect. George stealthily tracks Susan and her bratty brood down for a terrifying climax. George's secret childhood trauma is revealed in flashback, and a final turn of the screw suggests that the nightmare is far from over.

Of all the slasher films that followed on the heels of John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978), William Lustig's *Maniac* (1981), and Romano Scavolini's *Nightmare* (also known as *Nightmares in a Damaged Brain*), are generally recognized as being among the most sleazy and transgressive. Both films delve into the psychopathology of a crazed, male loner and both are uncompromising in the amount of onscreen blood and gore. *Maniac* has a lot going for it, with a scene-stealing performance by character actor Joe Spinell, and a fetid, oppressive atmosphere. *Maniac's* narrative takes a sudden, unexpected detour when Spinell sets his sights on Caroline Munro and temporarily becomes Mr. Disco. *Nightmare*, on the other hand has no stars—male lead Baird Stafford would only make one other film, and the majority of the cast are making their singular film appearances. While *Nightmare* has long stretches of nothing happening—*traîner en longueur*, spending far too much time in the sunny Florida setting, *Nightmare* is by far the most downbeat and depraved of the two. Unlike *Maniac*, *Nightmare* has no compunction about tossing very young children into its sick storyline, as both victim and perpetrator. The flashback wherein George, as a bow-tied young boy gorily murders both his father and a prostitute with an ax will never, ever be forgotten by any audience member.

Now on a double-disc DVD from Code Red, the contemporary gorehound can turn a clear and analytic eye to a film that is remembered mostly for something unrelated to gore and bloodshed. Makeup maestro Tom Savini arrived on the Staten Island location for the chief murder scene for a single day and was somehow credited as being a *Nightmare's* special effects consultant. Distributor 21st Century Corporation proudly trumpeted Savini's name on *Nightmare's* 1-sheets, trailers and advertising until receiving a cease and desist letter. The rather routine but very effective gore effects for *Nightmare* were courtesy of esteemed makeup effects artist Ed French and Cleve Hall, the latter who joins actor Baird Stafford on the DVD's commentary track.

Code Red DVD goes all out for the extras on this two-disc set. There are no less than three versions of the film to choose from: two anamorphic transfers, one from a 2008 high definition master taken from two 35mm prints, while another is a 2011 telecine taken from a "slightly better" print. There is also a color corrected full frame transfer from 2005 that accompanies the 2008 version on Disc One.

The 2005 and 2008 versions show a great deal of wear, but this isn't necessarily a deficit. Remember, a battered print means the film was unspooled again and again before greedy eyes demanding that special jolt that only the Inner City Theater or shabby drive-in could provide. The commentary track with Baird and makeup artist Hall, moderated by Lee Christian is brimming with detail. Stafford has razor-sharp memories of the shoot, notes every single last interstate used for the extensive traveling scenes. Other tidbits we glean are that director Scavolini worked with Federico Fellini, and the New York locations were largely filmed on Staten Island "probably next door to Andy Milligan's house," as someone jokes.

"The Making of Nightmare", a feature including interviews with Hall and Stafford reveals even more anecdotal information. Hall, dressed as a Goth pirate, complete with greatcoat, bondage bracelets and mascara recalls the Savini controversy. Stafford, on the other hand is upfront about his homosexuality and tells how he was able to transfer his longings for men to women in order to play a murderous heterosexual. Stafford also shares that he is a convert to Wicca! A brief interview with effects artist Ed French highlights French's makeup career as a whole—while not a household name, we learn French has an Emmy or two backing up his resume.

The second disc, with the telecine version of the film has a most curious extra: an interview with *Nightmare* director Romano Scavolini in Italian—without English subtitles! *Nightmare* was reportedly a very troublesome film for Code Red DVD. The company went to the mat for this particular title with many false starts and disappointments. The inclusion of the Scavolini interview, a single talking head shot, held for a whopping 95 minutes, almost as long as the film itself, conducted entirely in Italian is a most unconventional choice. It seems to say "We've lost sleep over this picture, we're going to give you this exclusive extra—but we're not expending one more iota of effort on this! We only have one life to live! There are also the expected trailers, TV spots and trailers for other Code Red DVD titles.

Greg Goodsell

HOUSE OF 1,000 DOLLS
Directed by Jeremy Summers
(1967) MGM Limited Edition DVD-R

While you'll generally find this film sold with a numerically-formatted title, English-language prints of *La Casa de las mil muñecas* spell it out as *House of One Thousand Dolls*. I mention this because debating this film's alphabetical placement in movie guides provides a welcome distraction from the chore of actually sitting through the feature.

British producer Harry Alan Towers (who contributed to the screenplay under his customary pseudonym of "Peter Welbeck") was in the middle of a run of exotically-flavored (yet low-budget) action thrillers aimed at capturing a lucrative portion of the current craze for all things James Bond... most notably a string of Fu Manchu outings featuring Christopher Lee as the title heavy. Towers (on the cusp of a lengthy partnership with director Jess Franco) and director Jeremy Summers, having completed the third in that series (*The Vengeance of Fu Manchu*), next took advantage of the availability of actor Vincent Price, shoehorning him into a would-be-controversial tale of international espionage and white slavery.

As "The Great Manderville," Price and his "lovely assistant" Rebecca (Martha Hyer) have been touring the world with e magic act in which they've managed to get away with "vanishing" various beautiful young women—in reality, the damsels are being whisked off to a secret place of business in Tangiers in order to provide "entertainment" for discerning, wealthy customers (you could tell this story, but you apparently still couldn't use the word "prostitution" if you wanted a mainstream release back then). Price may have top billing, but George Nader takes the actual lead as agent Stephen Armstrong, determined to crack the case while displaying open contempt for the local law enforcement. Naturally, the villains attempt to counter Armstrong's efforts by targeting his wife Marie (Ann Smyrner) for disappearance. Miniature dolls and playing cards masquerade as important clues, and Price wields a cane-gun in a token nod towards Bondian gadgetry, but the "exotic" flavor is severely compromised by Towers' attempt to pass Madrid off as North Africa—his idea of a spectacular "chase" location, for example, is a junkyard in which a pile of dead cars manages to muster up an impressive chain-reaction explosion. Naturally, the international flavor is supplied by the living "dolls" themselves (including Franco regular Maria Rohm), always seen in flimsy negligees whether they're enticing clients or attempting escape. Price, of course, is dependably suave when he takes the magician's stage or displays the obligatory "you *must* let me show you around" false hospitality to our underwhelming hero, but he's clearly in this for name value alone—Towers really had no idea how to use him and never worked with him again. Fans of the actor will miss nothing by skipping this.

House received a brief theatrical release courtesy of AIP in a shortened version which showed up in viciously-cropped form on a 1990s VHS release from HBO Video. MGM's "Limited Edition" disc-on-demand, however, serves up a significantly longer cut of the film (extended dialogue and a more sadistic "whipping" sequence, but no actual nudity or game-changing plot elements), not actually remastered but presented in full 2.35:1 widescreen. But if you're one of those completists who simply *must* have this title, don't throw your old tape away just yet, as the bouncy title song (penned by Bond lyricist Don Black) heard in the AIP version—and still credited on screen—fails to materialize in this rendition.

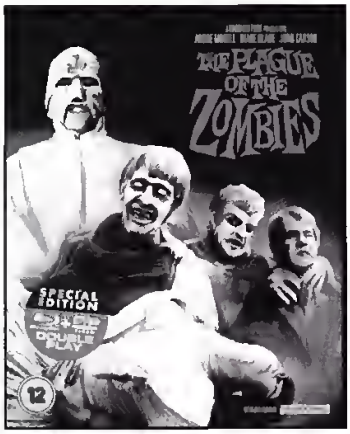
Shane M. Dallmann

QUICK FLICKS

Brief reviews and news

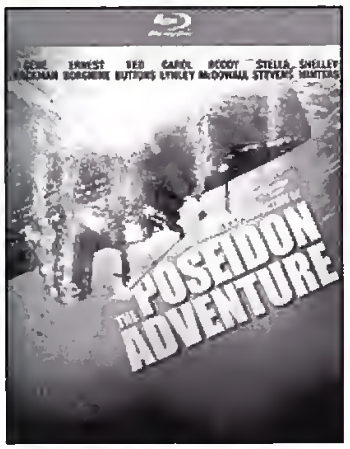
HOOKED ON CLASSICS

In 2011, film fans were overjoyed to learn that 1932's *Island of Lost Souls* was finally getting a DVD release. With that holy grail put to bed, only a handful of horror classics have not made their way to disc. It is now time to add 1944's *The Uninvited* to the better-late-than-never list. Universal Picture's haunted house thriller can be found as an import licensed by Exposure Cinema. Sadly, there is no U.S. release date as of yet, and if you don't own an all region DVD player, you're out of luck, as *The Uninvited* is a PAL disc. Although extras are few, expect a remastered picture, an illustrated collector's booklet featuring exclusively commissioned articles and lobby card reproductions, a gallery of production stills and posters, and the film's theatrical trailer.



HAMMER TIME!

Studio Canal announced last year that they have the rights to a large portion of the Hammer Films library, and in March, they introduced the first of these titles with *Dracula, Prince of Darkness*. No sooner than you could say out-of-print, the title was swiftly recalled when buyers were disappointed to learn that the Blu-ray had audio sync problems. Although Studio Canal is correcting this glitch (and it's a major glitch to be sure), let's hope that their latest titles *The Plague of the Zombies* and *The Reptile* are free of defects. U.S. customers beware—the Studio Canal Blu-ray discs are region B only.



WHAT A DISASTER!

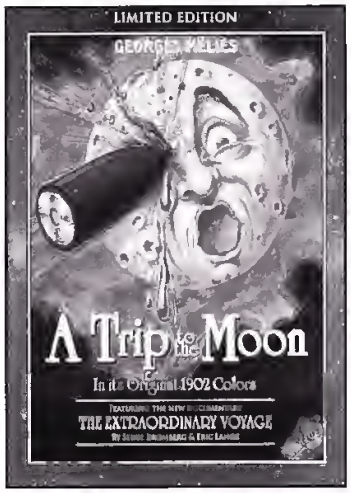
If Irwin Allen were alive today, he would be smiling. The king of disaster films (*The Towering Inferno*, *The Swarm*) couldn't come up with a better idea—quietly release 1972's *The Poseidon Adventure* on Blu-ray, but make it a Walmart exclusive title. I think I would rather take a chance on boarding a sinking ship than search for the film at my local Walmart.

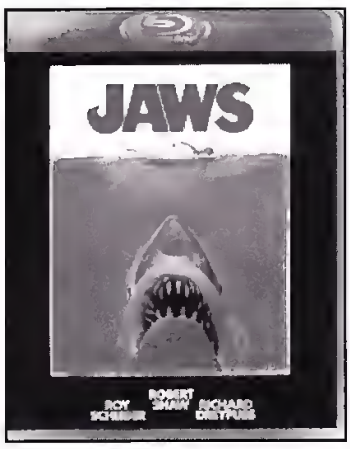
SO LONG PHYSICAL MEDIA? NOT SO FAST . . .

Netflix CEO Reed Hastings learned the hard way that not everyone can (or wants to) stream movies. Many film junkies (myself included) still prefer DVDs and Blu-rays. Both physical formats offer extra features (commentary, trailers, etc.) that are missing when streaming is your only option. Granted, streaming does have its advantages—especially if you prefer renting than owning—and more and more films that haven't found their way to DVD yet are available through streaming only. That said, it is great to see that MPI's *Dark Shadows: The Complete Original Series* (131 discs, $699.00 retail) sold out within days of its pre-order sale on amazon.com. A representative at MPI told *Screem* that they were hoping the limited edition 2500 copies would sell out by the end of the year, but everyone was shocked when this high ticket item was gone so quickly. We wouldn't be surprised if the same situation occurs with Flicker Alley's Steelbook Blu-ray/DVD combo for Georges Méliès' silent classic *A Trip to The Moon* (1902). Limited to 4000 pieces and retailing for $39.95, extras on the disc include a new film score by the French band Air and *The Extraordinary Voyage*, a fascinating 65-minute documentary about the life of Georges Méliés' and the magic of film history and preservation.

WE MISSED A FEW, AND BID YOU ADIEU . . .

Lamberto Bava's *Demons* and *Demons 2* appear on a special edition Blu-ray or DVD steelbook (Arrow import). Olive Films brings *The Space Children* and *The Colossus of New York* to Blu-ray. From Warners comes the *Altered States* Special Edition Blu-ray. Image Entertainment has an H.G. Lewis double feature Blu-ray of *The Wizard of Gore* and *The Gore Gore Girls*. New on Blu-ray from Kino are *Ganja & Hess*, *The Asphyx*, *Requiem for a Vampire*, *The Rape of the Vampire*, *The Demoniacs*, and *Justine*. And Universal presents the long awaited HD edition of *Jaws on Blu-ray*, complete with new extras and 7.1 surround sound!





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